



Gwirfoddoli dros
Sir Benfro
Volunteering for
Pembrokeshire

A self-serve guide to

Volunteer Passports

What exactly are they?

What kind is best for my organisation?

How can we develop
our own approach?



Funded by
UK Government
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Overview

About this guide

This resource is designed to support volunteer-involving organisations who want to explore the potential of volunteer passports, helping them to collaborate with like-minded organisations to grow collectively, improve the quality of their programmes or enhance the experience for volunteers.

For those new to passports it serves as a general introduction and, for those that wish to go further, as a field guide to some of the more common models of passports and their typical use cases. Be aware that it does not make recommendations, and neither is it a comprehensive manual for building your own volunteer passport. It is more of a 'self-serve' learning resource, helping you to make an informed decision on whether volunteer passports offer potential for you and your volunteering programme.

Popular myths and misconceptions

Before diving into the guide consider the following, which may help frame your approach:

- Despite the many opinions expressed about volunteer passports, **there is no one fixed model or definition**. Organisations develop them for many different reasons, which perhaps is why they cover a range of different objectives, or have a reputation for being complex or difficult to implement;
- Some pursue them with an organisational goal in mind – perhaps gaining access to a bigger pool of volunteers, or to streamline systems and processes. Others see them as ways to enhance the volunteer experience. Many have multiple, simultaneous objectives, **which can make passports seem attractive but can also dilute their focus or confuse the design**.
- Many begin with the technical possibilities - particularly those offered by digital systems. However, passports tend to **raise as many cultural challenges as they do technical questions** - perhaps in how to agree on common standards (in training or vetting, for example) or in convincing your volunteers to use them. Allowing enough lead in time to develop a clear brief, or build a consensus, is often vital for success.

In summary, though you already have many strong instincts for what you want from a passport, try to keep an open mind. This guide is designed to help you decide on your main needs - your primary 'use case' for a volunteer passport.

We are working in very a challenging era for recruiting and retaining volunteers, and while passports aren't a panacea or silver bullet, they can help you to **grow** your

programmes, make them more **efficient** or positively enhance the **experience** for existing and potential volunteers.

Getting Started



What are Volunteer Passports?

In many ways Volunteer Passports do many of the same things as travel passports -helping people move around and prove their identity or credentials, within official systems or institutions. In volunteering they focus on solving challenges (or realising opportunities) around **volunteer portability** (the ability to move quickly and easily between activities, or the organisations hosting them) and/or **volunteer validation** (demonstrating what the volunteer has achieved, for those inside or outside of your volunteering 'ecosystem').

Portability: it's about systems

Portability-focused passports seek to join-up (or reduce friction between) the different stages of the volunteer journey – expressing interest, recruitment, onboarding, recognition and others. Portability models are useful for Volunteer Managers interested in making efficiency gains for themselves (usually reducing duplication of steps or effort) or giving volunteers a better experience (a smoother, easier journey). Portability types focus on volunteering systems, mechanisms and processes – some call this 'passporting'.

Validation: it's about the passport

In contrast, other types of passport are built around the product itself – the volunteer's physical or digital record of identity and credentials, a shareable profile tool that validates who they are and what they have achieved. A host organisation may use this to review expressions of interest from individuals looking to volunteer with them.

Validation-focused passports are often owned or administered by the volunteer themselves, even if hosted somewhere central or neutral (like a Council for Voluntary Service, or Volunteer Centre, working on behalf of different partners across an area). Here, volunteers generally control their own data and are given the tools to grant access to the passport to the different organisations with whom they want to volunteer, or others who already know them, so that the information on their profile can be formally checked or verified.

Further Reading

WcVA CgGC

What kind of information is captured in a passport profile?

WCVA notes that Passport profiles often contain details designed to help grant exemption to a volunteer from having to repeat basic topics when they move to a new voluntary position, such as:

- verification of the volunteer's **identity**
- their **DBS** status
- a record of any relevant **training** successfully undertaken

read more here

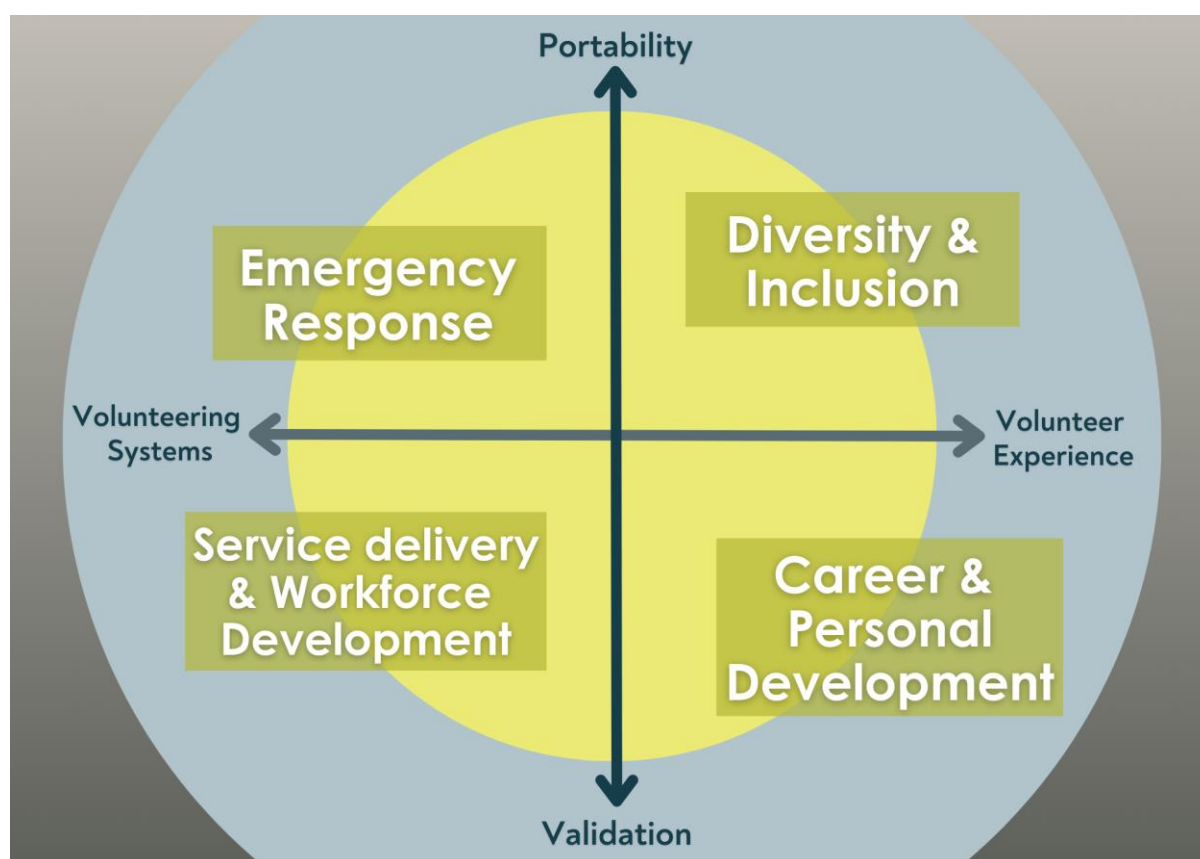
Considering your options



What type of passport is best for your volunteer programme?

In practice, many models serve both portability and validation objectives, but a helpful starting point may be to consider whether you have a preference for either, or whether you seek to balance the two.

The diagram below illustrates this 'portability/validation' spectrum on the 'y' or vertical axis. Alternatively, you could think about whether your main use case relates more to improving your own systems or enhancing the volunteer experience - this spectrum is represented on the 'x' or horizontal axis. Take soundings from your colleagues, or review feedback from your volunteers, to help you answer these questions.



The four types of passports covered here (yellow boxes) are just four potential models, built around some generic goals commonly seen in the world of volunteering. They are included for illustration only - they may speak to your ambitions or needs to some degree, or simply point you in the general direction you wish to head.

Consider your preferences using these spectrums to see if you already have any firm preferences. Whether you do or do not at this stage, on the next page you can explore these

four models in more detail. And on pages 7-10 we go further, describing how passports (of all kinds) are put together - the different building blocks involved.

At a glance: **Common Passport Types**

	Types of Volunteer Passport			
	Emergency Response	Diversity & Inclusion	Service delivery & Workforce Development	Career & Personal Development
What they do / are for	Rapid brokerage in 'surge' (time-sensitive) situations, to agreed standards	Building a more inclusive and welcoming volunteering culture	Supporting collaboration through a shared pool, smoothing out demand and supply	Capturing and verifying the experience and benefits gained
Where you see them	During civic or public health crises (e.g. Covid-19, or maybe extreme weather events)	In local areas prioritising volunteering, seeking to widen access to those often excluded	Anywhere volunteers are recognised in the workforce, or as a credible pathway into paid work	Youth-focused or community integration initiatives (e.g. with refugees or migrants)
Core build elements	Strong Quality Assurance built on shared standards (such as vetting, training, governance or data)	Quick onboarding, lighter standards, supported pathways - highlighting personal benefits	Common training and vetting systems, signposting, and recognition elements	Strong focus on the passport's validation functions (the profile element)
Governance & administration	Likely to led by a local, neutral partner (such as a CVS or Volunteer Centre) and / or funded by a statutory partner (often a Local Authority).		Less need for a central admin if trust / partner agreements in place to manage shared liabilities	Often the partner closest to the volunteer audience.
Focus of digital tools	Brokerage and management functions – often volunteer-led, self-selecting time-sensitive tasks	Brokerage with choice and flexibility, including 'while you wait' options (e.g. training or learning)	Facilitating access to volunteers (for partners) tools to verify training and experience, signposting if	The profile as a verifiable and sharable record of volunteering

			volunteer's 'first choice' is full	
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Checking your assumptions: [engaging colleagues](#)

If by this point you have an emerging model in mind for your passport, it might be a good time to consult with your team or wider partners to gain their insights and create a consensus. Here are some suggested discussion points:

- Do the intended users of your Passport have a common bond?** Research suggests some commonality amongst your volunteers enables a better design, improving the chances it will land well and get good uptake. Commonality might be a shared geographic area (making improving where they live a shared focus), a shared demographic (such as passports targeting younger volunteers) or a shared identity (a cultural factor, a health condition or similar).
- Do you have the right partners on Board?** Though it's possible to develop a Passport alone, within your own programme, chances are you'll want to work with others. These might be partners in your geographic area, or others who share your interest in growing volunteering. What do you need to do to bring them on Board, or build a consensus around your idea? Understanding partners' needs, ambitions and red lines early on is as important to good design as having a clear idea of volunteer preferences.
- Do you need a neutral broker or administrator?** These are more common in area-based passport models, or where there's a natural infrastructure lead. They're also helpful if you've taken the time to develop shared standards – a neutral partner (someone not engaging the volunteers themselves) can focus on consistency or application, in brokerage and supporting volunteers in the early stages.
- Does your passport have credibility amongst the intended users?** Given trust is often a key factor (in partners agreeing on shared standards, to to verify volunteers or sharing personal data) it's important that both volunteers and those administering the system fully believe in it. Sometimes this extends to confidence in the partners who back or fund the initiative – consider whether this should influence how your passport's brand and communications.

Next Steps

By now you will hopefully have a good instinct for whether volunteer passports offer any benefit or potential within your own programme - as well as some early instincts into how and where you might use them. The rest of this guide is devoted to helping you refine your needs, plan your approach and take the next steps.

Building a Volunteer Passport



What makes up a Passport, or 'passporting' system?

Research suggests there are seven common elements to all volunteer passports, though not all are essential for every type. It's perfectly possible (and often sensible) to start with your core needs only, your 'minimum viable product'. If you can build a simple system that works well for you, your volunteers and your partners, you can usually add more elements over time.

The 'jigsaw' approach

Passports are usually created and delivered through **a series of co-ordinated agreements, systems and shared infrastructure**, including some (or all of) the seven elements below¹ in different combinations, a bit like a jigsaw.

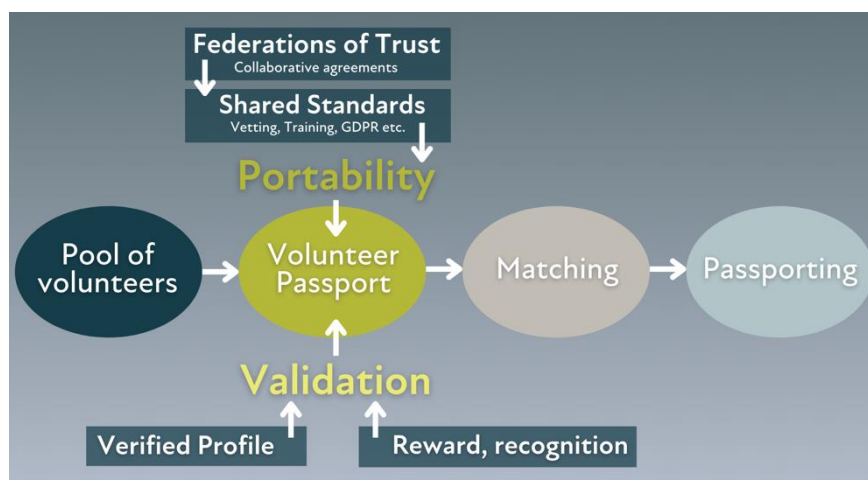
1. **'Federations of trust'** - collaborative partnership agreements covering how you and your partners plan to work together
2. **Shared standards** - agreements related to your quality assurance systems - usually how you will collectively vet or train volunteers, or perhaps manage shared governance or data protection arrangements
3. **A shared pool of volunteers** – an identified group or type of individuals you wish to engage (whether currently volunteering or not)
4. **Shared brokerage solutions** - tools or systems to direct volunteers to the most appropriate opportunities, match them with tasks or roles or help them to self-select, based on their preferences
5. **A profile or 'portfolio'** - the volunteer's 'passport' or record of their contributions and achievements, often digital with access tools to let wider partner view the contents
6. **Routes to validate volunteer learning** - tools to verify training and give official endorsements, to be recorded in the passport
7. **Reward schemes** – additional systems delivering incentives and perks, linked to volunteering.

¹ Features of Volunteer Passports, from 'Research into Volunteer Passports' (DCMS, 2021)

Piecing the jigsaw together

In the diagram below we begin to see how these different elements might be assembled into a comprehensive Volunteer Passport system. Notice how some elements serve the portability function, while others are more geared towards validation objectives.

Reflect on this model, alongside the common models describe on pages 4 and 5, to help you identify your most essential elements – those aspects of a passport system you might need to develop, build or agree on the shape of, with others.

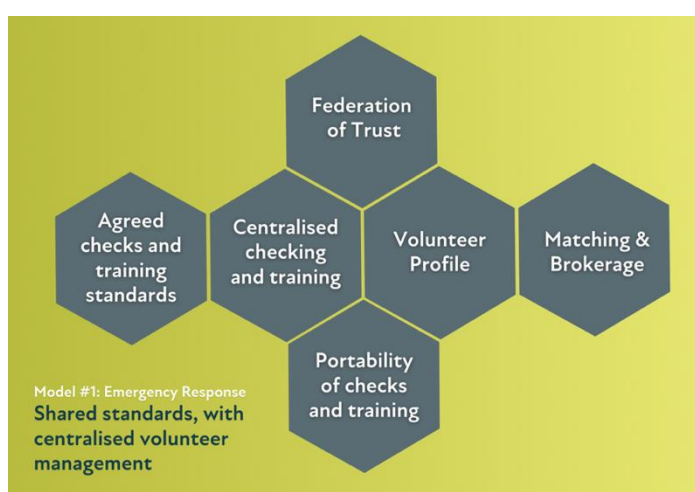


Further examples

What about our ‘common types’ of passport, as described on pages 4 and 5? Which elements best serve those kinds of common use cases?

Emergency Response

In this example (used during COVID-19 to speed up onboarding and rapid volunteer deployment, by avoiding duplication of training and vetting checks) the ‘Federation of Trust’ between partners puts in place arrangements for central management of training and vetting, which in turn makes roles portable across participating organisations. A visible volunteer profile completes the system.



In some variations volunteer vetting is not centralised – partners simply accept each other’s checks on trust. These types of passports are not aimed at any one type of volunteer, but central to all varieties is the volunteer identity of being in a ‘pool’.

Diversity and Inclusion

Here the focus is on encouraging new audiences into volunteering – especially those who may have been traditionally excluded. To achieve this, the model includes as few barriers to entry as possible, hence an absence of any agreed standards and the inclusion of elements designed to empower the individual to gain agency from volunteering (validation and profile elements) and to support their experience (through reward and recognition).



Service Delivery & Workforce Development, Career & Personal Development

The final two models are quite similar in the different elements they use – the major difference being those enabling volunteering for entry into a workforce (model #3) focus on the shared standards of the industry in question, whereas those engaging volunteering as an aide to personal or career development (model #4) typically have fewer prescribed standards, instead focusing more on the volunteer portfolio and its ability to showcase the volunteers’ achievements.



Like Model #1, Model #3 (training based) facilitates greater portability across partners through its common training standard, creating efficiencies for partners and an enhanced experience for volunteers through the recognition and rewards gained via formal learning.

These models are often found where there is a common sector or industry (e.g. healthcare), or in a local area with a clear geographic footprint (like a local authority) and tend to appeal to those who want to volunteer for more than one organisation.

In contrast, Model #4 avoids additional barriers to entry (such as fixed standards) and is built around the volunteer's ability to create a profile (or portfolio) which they use as evidence and validation of their learning and voluntary contribution. Though the skills gained may vary, some potential for portability remains, both within volunteering and the labour market. These models highlight the benefits of volunteering to the volunteer, and are often used with young people, those seeking employment, or marginalised groups that may need greater support to volunteer, or gain access to employment.

What about digital?

Whatever model you decide to explore, you'll likely need some element of digital infrastructure, but consider this once you have a good idea of your basic approach: designing your passport around digital possibilities may lead to choose options you don't really need or convince you to adopt technologies just because they are new or popular with others. Here's a list of common elements found in a passport's typical digital 'stack':

1. ID verification software

These programmes enable the volunteer to formally 'verify' their ID, usually by uploading official documents such as a passport or drivers' licence. This can speed up applications and onboarding, saving the Volunteer Manager time and effort.



2. DBS integration

Many hope that some integration with the Disclosure and Barring Service will speed up what can be a time-consuming stage of the volunteer journey.

Options may range from the ability to record an existing DBS certificate in the profile to something more integrated with the checking stage itself. Conversations with digital providers are advised here, as bespoke code may be required to link different systems together.



3. An application portal

This is the digital 'front door' through which a volunteer expresses interest or fully applies. You may already have one of these within your own website, use an open national platform or one specific to your area or sector. Ask whoever administers this for details of how easily the platform can integrate with other systems.



4. Integration with your own management software

How does your passport link with your own 'back-end' system for managing volunteers? Deciding which 'VMS' (volunteer management system) to adopt or purchase is often one of the first digital questions Volunteer Managers face when moving away from



paper records or excel spreadsheets. Again, a conversation with whoever provides your current or preferred software should reveal your main options.

5. Wider integrations



Finally, there may be other external systems or platforms to which you'd like to link your passport, providing additional value for volunteers. Online training sites and reward and recognition schemes are common choices here, but anything that supports your whole volunteer pathway could be worth considering.

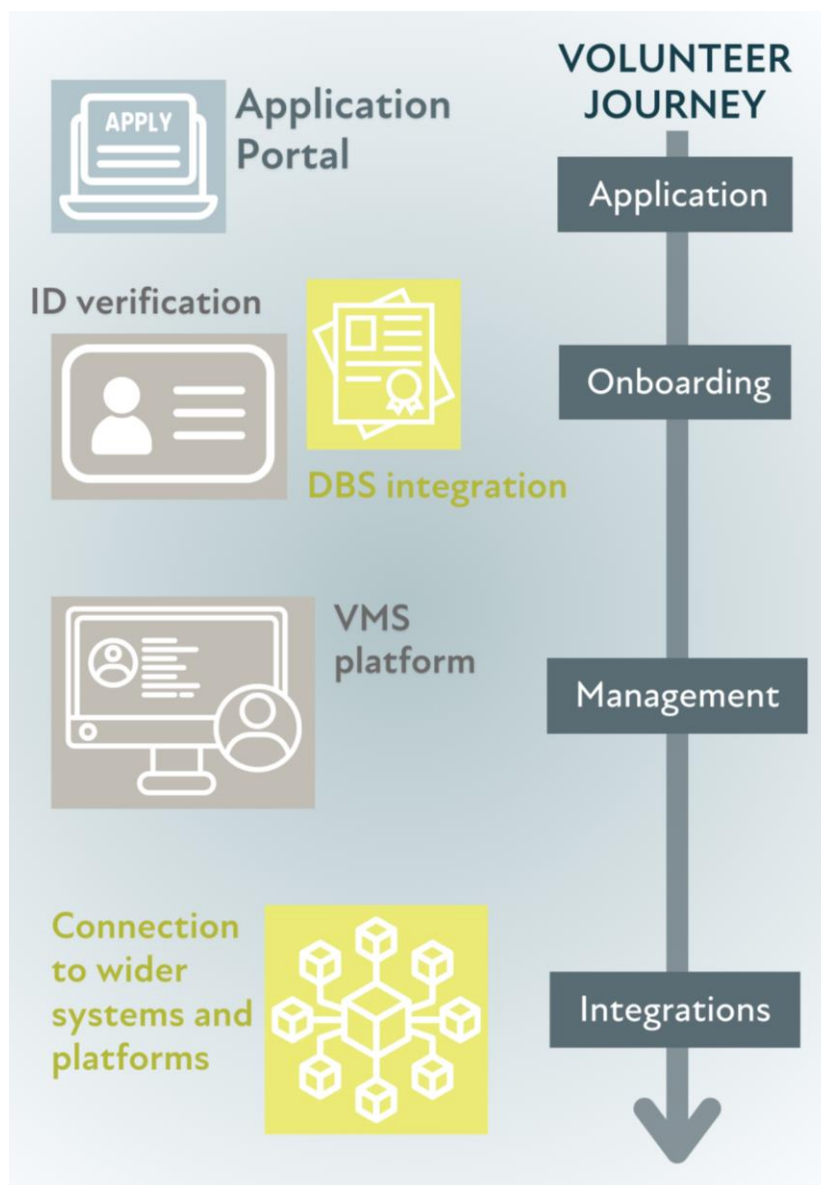
Getting help with digital

If you're new to considering digital options, software or integrations in volunteering, you're not alone. For many volunteer managers, even a conversation with a software developer or digital expert can feel quite daunting.

Helpfully, much of your passport's design work can be done before digital needs to be considered, meaning that by the time you're ready to speak with a provider or specialist you should have a good brief to give them. At this point, most reputable experts or software providers will be able to guide you through your options.

In the meantime, this diagram shows how some of the elements of a common digital stack (described on the last page) integrate into the different stages of the volunteer journey.

And if you'd like to work on your own digital literacy, try this [Digital in Volunteering Toolkit](#), built with the co-operation of the Association of Volunteer Managers. It's been designed especially for those new to these questions, helping to increase your knowledge, confidence and motivation to use digital tools on your volunteering programme.



Developing your Blueprint



By now you should have a good awareness of some of the main questions to consider when designing your preferred model of passport, such as:

- are you more interested in portability or validation? In efficiencies for your organisation, or a better experience for volunteers?
- which of the common 'jigsaw pieces' you might need to build your ideal framework? And which digital elements would best support this?
- How much do you understand about your volunteer group – do they have commonality, binding them together, to enable you to construct a viable volunteer journey for your passport?

On page 6 we encouraged you to check your early assumptions with colleagues. Whether you did this or not, now might be a good time to call a meeting to inform your preferred design and next steps. Given passports generally require a lot of trust and collaboration, building in plenty of time to engage stakeholders and take people with you is vital.

The table below could be used as an agenda for such a meeting, or even as the basis of a risk register for your project – alerting you to common challenges or tricky questions you might be asked.

Area of Risk	Questions to consider
Design risks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is there sufficient commonality within your volunteer group? • Flexibility – do you require hard standards for all to follow, or can you cope with local adaptations? • Credibility – will volunteers respond well? Will wider partners get behind it? Do your backers have the confidence of key audiences? • Accessibility – is it user friendly (for volunteers and administrators)
Resourcing risks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sustainability – have you costed the elements you’d need to sustain it – building, maintenance and ongoing administration?
Technological risks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge – do you have the expertise within your partnership to support your digital conversations with confidence? • Integration – have you mapped the network of systems or wider platforms with whom you might need to connect?
Governance and quality risks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Liability - when ‘sharing’ volunteers (or their data) clarity on liabilities is important for securing partner buy in, as well as risk management once your passport is operating • Validation – do you have agreement on the Quality Assurance processes that will give all partners sufficient confidence to accept each other’s vetting, training and verification judgements?

FURTHER INFORMATION

Links and case studies of Volunteer Passports

From Wales

- In this [blog post](#), WCVA explores the potential for Volunteer Passports in Wales.
- Here the Association of Voluntary Organisations in Wrexham (AVOW) describe their intentions to [create a bank of volunteers](#) following their local experiences in COVID-19. This [national report into volunteering experiences during the pandemic](#) noted demand for a passport in Wrexham, and this [news report from 2021](#) picks up the story, describing the Wrexham Community Response Team’s launch of their Volunteer Passport.

- This [consultant-led scoping report](#) (2021) explores the potential for a volunteer passport scheme in West Glamorgan, in the aftermath of COVID-19. These efforts were more [briefly summarised by Neath Port Talbot CVS](#) and in a [WCVA blog](#) describing the main processes being considered.
- This [illustrated resource from WCVA](#) explores some of the collaborative lessons and insights of volunteering in Wales during COVID-19, which may be a useful foundational resource for those at the start of their passporting journey. It contains summary notes from a cluster of environmental organisations, all with in Snowdonia who developed a joint approach to volunteer recruitment using a common web-based platform. Insights from Volunteering Wales and Age Cymru are also included.
- The [Volunteering Wales](#) website already supports some elements of passporting capability, enabling volunteers to record and share personal details with a potential host organisation via a QR code. This is a good example of building passporting functionality using simple, existing open-source technology.
- Though not related directly to volunteering, this [Reservoirs Passport scheme](#), administered by the Bannau Brycheiniog National Park Authority and Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water, provides outdoor activity groups with streamlined access to a number of reservoirs.

From further afield

- The most comprehensive evidence base on passports in the UK is the UK Government's [Research into Volunteer Passports](#) (2021). Much of the information in this guide is derived from these findings.
- The [Norfolk Volunteer Passport](#) is a training-based programme helping volunteers gain the foundational knowledge and skills to help them find new roles more quickly and move more easily between roles.
- [Northamptonshire's Volunteer Passport](#) is designed to encourage volunteering and make access easier within their local area.
- Though not a full Passport, Health Education England have produced a standardised [volunteer learning programme](#), linked to the NHS volunteering certificate. This [set of FAQs](#) shows how the programme has been adopted by partners in Lancashire.
- The health-focused charity [Helpforce](#) have a range of resources designed to support engagement with volunteer passports, including a [how to guide to volunteer portability](#), [examples of training offered](#) within passports, a [webinar on portability and passporting](#) and an [exploration of the nature of volunteer portability as a challenge](#) for health systems.
- A training and learning-focused passport supporting volunteers across the [Open Mental Health Network](#) (based in South West England).
- [This passport](#) provides training and recognition for volunteers with volunteer-involving organisations across the city of Plymouth.

- This [national carer's passport](#) is not primarily connected to volunteering ambitions but is instructive if you wish your passport to provide formal identification, recognition or wider support for your volunteer group.

Additional help

- The [Volunteer Centre, based at PAVS](#) can support you with a wide range of sample policies, documents and services to help you advertise, recruit, manage and celebrate volunteers. If you're outside of Pembrokeshire, [find your nearest Volunteer Centre here](#).
- The [Third Sector Support Wales Knowledge Hub](#) has free resources designed to help you stay informed, improve your knowledge and connect with others
- [West Glamorgan Volunteering Support](#) helps organisations interested in involving volunteers through a broad range of resources and support services

Acknowledgements

This project, commissioned by [PAVS](#) (Pembrokeshire Association of Voluntary Services) is funded by the UK Government, through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund.



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The Guide (and shorter Information Sheet) was developed by [Gethyn Williams](#), an UK independent consultant specialising in volunteering strategy, in late 2024 and early 2025.

