



What are

# Volunteer Passports?

FAQs for volunteer-involving organisations



Funded by  
UK Government

Wedi ei ariannu gan  
Llywodraeth y DU

# Volunteer Passports: Frequently Asked Questions



This information sheet provides an introduction to some of the key questions often faced when exploring Volunteer Passports. For those who wish to go further, PAVS provides a longer [Guide to Volunteer Passports](#) – a self-serve resource helping you refine your needs and identify your preferred approach.

## What are Volunteer Passports?

There is no one fixed model or definition. Volunteer-Involving Organisations (VIOs) develop them for many reasons, though all are built around a series of **co-ordinated agreements, shared systems and infrastructure** that seek to improve:

- **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? Validation? Or both?

Portability-focused passports are about improving the systems underpinning volunteering, joining-up the different stages of the volunteer journey to improve efficiency or quality or to enhance the 'customer' experience for volunteers.

In contrast, validation types are built around the passport itself – the volunteer's physical or digital record of their identity and credentials. Volunteers grant passport access to VIOs to speed up their applications, or have their records checked and verified.

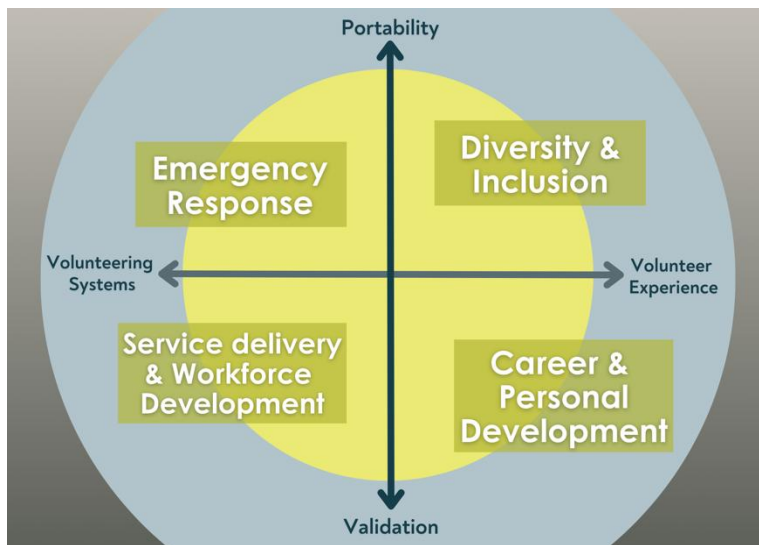
## Why do volunteer-involving organisations consider passports?

It's a challenging era for recruiting and retaining volunteers, and while passports aren't a panacea they can help to **grow a volunteering programme, make it more efficient** or positively **enhance the experience for volunteers**. They are useful to explore if you want to collaborate with like-minded organisations in these areas.

## What type of passport is best for your volunteer programme?

Though some aim to meet both **portability** and **validation** objectives, identifying whether you are drawn to one or the other can be helpful in identifying your best starting points. If this doesn't help, consider instead whether your aims are more focused on improving your own **systems** or enhancing the volunteer **experience**.

As we see below, these two spectrums (portability/validation and experience/systems) start to suggest different models of passport you might explore – four different but quite common ‘use cases’ for a volunteer passport.



For example, **passports geared more towards portability and systems** (top left) are well-placed to support emergency response or ‘surge’ models of volunteer mobilisation, as witnessed during COVID-19.

Rapid deployment is a key goal here, with quality and consistency maintained through a range of shared standards.

In contrast, a passport more concerned with **volunteer experience and validation** (bottom right) would be better suited to those using volunteering to enhance personal or career goals. Here we find fewer common or fixed standards (such as a training curriculum or vetting process) – the emphasis is on accessibility and giving the volunteer agency.

**These four models are by no means the only types of passports. More information is included in the [full guide](#), with suggestions on how to refine your approach.**

### What makes up a Passport?

National research tells us that every type of passport is built from a combination of seven core elements - though bear in mind that not every type requires all seven.

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 - how you will collectively vet or train volunteers, manage governance or data protection
3. **A shared pool of volunteers** – an identified group 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, or help them to self-select
5. **A profile or ‘portfolio’** - the volunteer’s ‘passport’ or record of their contributions and achievements, often digital with access options for partners
6. **Routes to validate volunteer learning** - tools to verify training and give official endorsements, recorded in the passport

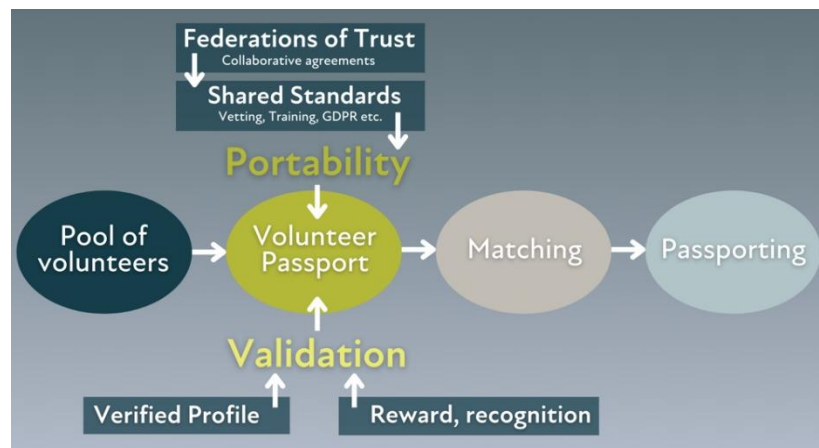
7. **Reward schemes** – additional systems delivering incentives and perks, linked to volunteering.

## Building your jigsaw



Depending on your preferred use case, the most desirable or useful elements can be arranged in different combinations, a bit like a jigsaw.

In this diagram we see how all seven elements might be assembled into a comprehensive passport system. Notice how some elements serve the portability function, while others are more geared towards validation objectives.



## What about digital?

Whatever model you decide to explore you'll likely need some elements of digital infrastructure, underpinning the functionality of your jigsaw. Here's a list of common elements found in a typical volunteer passport's digital 'stack':

### 1. ID verification software



Enables the volunteer to formally 'verify' their ID, usually by uploading official documents such as a passport or drivers' licence.

### 2. DBS integration



Options may range from the ability to record an existing DBS certificate in the volunteer profile, to something more integrated with the checking stage.

### 3. An application portal



The digital 'front door' through which a volunteer applies. You may already have your own preferred platform for this, with possibilities to integrate it with systems serving different stages of the volunteer journey.

other

### 4. Integration with your own volunteer management software



Speak to whoever provides your software to explore the potential to integrate this with your passport systems.

## 5. Wider integrations



Any other external systems or platforms to which you'd like to link your passport, such as online training platforms or reward and recognition schemes.

### Next steps



**By now you may already have a good awareness of some of the key features of passports that might best serve your needs. Before going further, consider the following questions:**

- Do you have a primary use case, or range of objectives in mind?** Is your passport more about portability or validation? Efficiency or experience? Or a combination?
- What binds your volunteer audience together?** Research suggests commonality is a key success factor, making it easier to design a volunteer journey that works for all. This might be a common geography (making local pride a key volunteer motivator) demographic (such as age) or identity (perhaps cultural, a health condition, or similar).
- Are all your partners and stakeholders on board?** Like commonality in the volunteer group, much of a passport's success also rests on trust and understanding between its partners. Factor in sufficient time to build consensus, ensuring you have buy-in and that your design is fit for purpose.
- Do you need a neutral broker or administrator?** A common role for Councils for Voluntary Service or Volunteer Centres in area-based passports, having a partner that doesn't engage the volunteers themselves but manages some aspect of the passport system can often be helpful in ensuring quality and consistency in applications, brokerage or other support for volunteers in the early stages.
- Does your passport have credibility?** A system only works if people want to use it – and that means both volunteers and those administering the system. Consider the role and visibility of key partners, funders and other stakeholders in your passport's visual identity and brand.
- Which elements or 'jigsaw pieces' best serve your objectives?** And what kind of digital stack do you need to support them? It's best to think about your preferred digital elements once you have a core design in mind. Building a passport around digital possibilities lead some to choose options they don't really need, adopting new technologies just because they are new or popular with others.

7. **Finally, try to keep your design and preferences simple.** Complexity is the enemy of volunteer passports - many VIOs load multiple expectations onto them, diluting their focus and confusing the design. It's often sensible to start with your most basic needs (your 'minimum viable product') and add more elements over time.

**Check out the full [Guide to Volunteer Passports](#) for further information and guidance.**

### 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 Information Sheet was commissioned by [PAVS](#) (Pembrokeshire Association of Voluntary Services) and funded through the UK Government, through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund.



Funded by  
UK Government  
Wedi ei ariannu gan  
Llywodraeth y DU

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

