

# VOLUNTEERING STRATEGY

---

2018-2021







## FOREWORD

Volunteers matter to The Royal Parks. Volunteering helps people connect with each other, with the wider community and perhaps most importantly the work of volunteers helps make our parks and open spaces even better. We want to support our volunteers and provide them with opportunities for development.

This strategy was developed following the formation of the new Royal Parks charity and after extensive research and consultation. Now is the time to strengthen our work with partners and volunteers with the aim of growing new opportunities and diversifying our networks.

I and my fellow trustees are hugely thankful to everyone who has made a commitment to support these remarkable green spaces. Their time, energy and commitment, skills and knowledge continue to have a very positive effect on our parks and on those who visit them.

Please join in, get involved and help London's Royal Parks flourish for years to come.



Loyd Grossman  
Chairman





Our mission for managing the Parks is ambitious – and **volunteers** are crucial to achieving this.

## INTRODUCTION

The Royal Parks is the charity that cares for 5,000 acres of magnificent parkland, rare habitats and historic buildings and monuments across London. Our eight Royal Parks are among the most visited attractions in the UK with over 77 million visitors each year. At the heart of what we do are hundreds of generous volunteers, working with us and partners to steward these national treasures. Their contribution within nature, heritage, wellbeing and learning programmes across the Parks is invaluable.

Volunteering in The Royal Parks (TRP) has grown organically over the years to meet the needs of particular parks, projects and teams. This has led to a great range of roles and activities and although the volunteer experience has been very good, it has not always been consistent across the organisation.

The formation of The Royal Parks charity in 2017 created the perfect opportunity to pause and take stock of the status of volunteering across the Parks – from the charity's point of view.

We wanted to examine the potential to support, improve and grow volunteering across these precious green spaces. This strategy sets out how we plan to place volunteering at the heart of the new charity, develop further volunteering opportunities, work more closely with our partner organisations and really look after our volunteers.

At the heart of this strategy are the talents, passion and commitment of our volunteers, many of whom have been volunteering with us for many years. They support our work in many different ways, from managing habitats, surveying wildlife, recording heritage, leading walks and talks, inspiring school children and helping to develop programmes, bringing advice and practical help.

This strategy's focus is about how people volunteer directly with The Royal Parks charity. We are appreciative of partners who organise their own volunteers to help the parks, such as The Friends Groups, The Royal Parks Guild, Operation Centaur, The Holly Lodge Centre and the Field Studies Council, many businesses based in London, the Horse Rangers Association and the Mayor's Team London Ambassadors. We are also mindful of the invaluable role that our contractors play in managing the Parks.

Caring for these precious urban green spaces and inspiring others to do the same is a huge task – and working hand in hand with volunteers is the only effective way to achieve our shared goal.

If we are to succeed we must build on existing successes and continue to engage the thousands of people who are keen to offer their time and talents and inspire many more to do so in the future. In return we will offer high quality, impactful and memorable volunteering experiences, working with and welcoming partners and individuals.

This is the first step in a long-term effort to improve the way we support all aspects of our volunteer programme.



# WHERE WE ARE NOW

## BACKGROUND

As a new charity, with over 50 different volunteer opportunities across the Parks, it was clear that a Volunteering Strategy was needed to provide a common purpose, direction and ambition to the volunteering programme.

This piece of work was also intended to demonstrate our long term commitment to volunteering and to attempt to quantify the value that the contributions of individuals make every day across the Royal Parks. The strategy has been guided by the new charity's strategic plan and will be reviewed in three years time.

## OUR APPROACH

During 2017 we worked with a consultant to produce an evidence-based review of volunteering across the Royal Parks and recommend a way forward. As part of this review we conducted:

- An online survey of existing volunteers, including TRP volunteers and those who volunteer with partner organisations (200+ respondents)
- Interviews with Royal Parks staff, volunteers and partner organisations
- Peer reviews
- An assessment of the current volunteer landscape in the UK

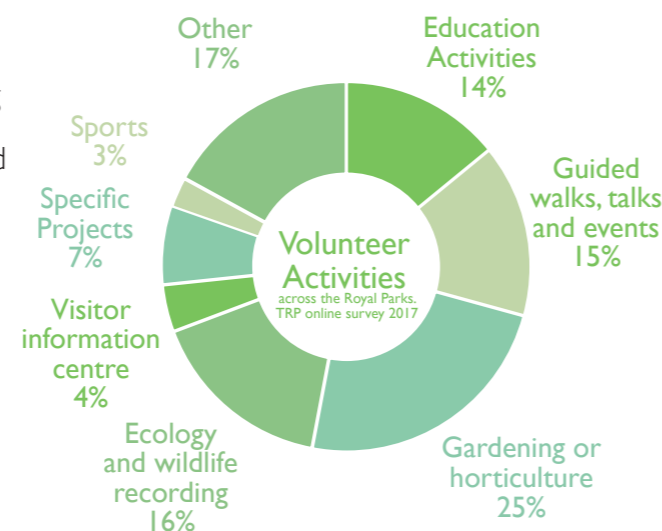
This thorough research helped us gain a clear picture of the current status of volunteering in the Royal Parks, and beyond. We took the time to examine the potential of volunteering in the new charity, considered new ways of doing things and identified new audiences and volunteer offers.

The findings have helped us understand the best way of delivering and managing an effective and rewarding Royal Parks volunteering programme, and created recommendations for delivery.

## WHAT WE FOUND

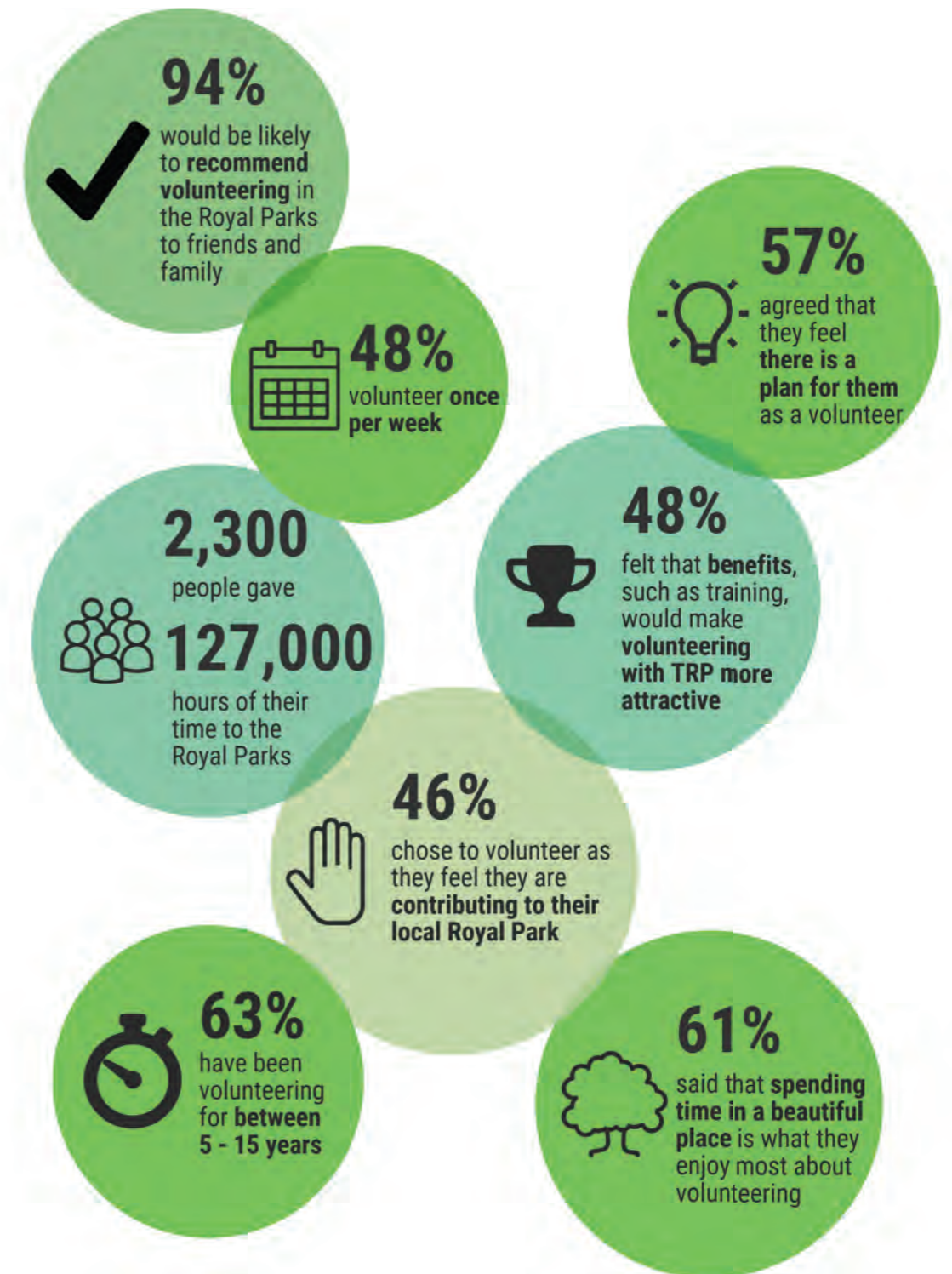
The national volunteering landscape has changed greatly in recent years, and although demand remains stable (around 14 million people volunteer at least once a month) the way people volunteer has transformed. Leading increasingly busy lives, people are favouring flexible and shorter volunteer opportunities. The volunteer sector has also become more competitive, with national and local charities vying for the same audiences.

Results from the interviews and volunteer survey indicate that whilst there are areas that The Royal Parks charity is doing well in, there is room for improvement. We have a hugely committed volunteer community, including partners, who contribute an incredible 127,000 hours to the Parks each year. Volunteers feel that the time they give is worthwhile, as many opportunities have developed organically responding to the actual needs of particular parks, projects and teams. In fact 90% of the volunteer survey respondents said they felt valued as a volunteer. However, volunteer management is perceived by some to be fragmented, communications are not consistent across TRP and there is unclear strategic direction or scope for growth. Successful examples of volunteering at TRP were consistently described as flexible, well resourced, based on trust, with clear communications and management.



## SNAPSHOT OF RESULTS FROM THE VOLUNTEER SURVEY

This survey was sent to existing volunteers, including TRP volunteers and those who volunteer with partner organisations. We had over 200 respondents.





## OUR MISSION FOR VOLUNTEERING

Our mission is to provide high-quality volunteer opportunities for everyone to explore, enjoy, value and make the Royal Parks even better. We will deliver a diverse mix of volunteer opportunities across nature, heritage, wellbeing and learning programmes, working with and welcoming partners and individuals to protect, conserve, interpret and enhance the Royal Parks.

The Royal Parks aspires to be a charity with volunteering at its heart, valuing each and every individual offering their time and talent to the cause.

### Our Principles:

- Connection to the cause – we aim to give clear strategic direction as to how every volunteer is making a difference
- Clear communication – provide leadership, coordination and support from the centre
- Partnership working – with Friends groups, community groups and networks
- Learning opportunities – provide expert training to enable continuous learning opportunities for volunteers
- Recognition – acknowledge and value the vital contribution that volunteers make

## OUR PLANS AND PRIORITIES

Developing our plans and priorities around volunteering has been a collective effort. Staff, volunteers and partner organisations across the Royal Parks have been involved or consulted in a variety of different ways. This approach has enabled us to determine key priorities over the next three years.

1. Strengthen the volunteer programme
2. Grow and diversify the volunteer base
3. Trial a Volunteer Community Ranger Service



*'While the teaching and guiding have been most rewarding, the friendships with the staff and fellow volunteers have been the highlight of my years with the parks. I enjoyed working with and getting to know people, particularly the students that visit the allotment.'*

Fred - Allotment Volunteer



### Tim's story

*"I got involved after walking to work one morning and seeing a hedgehog in Regent's Park. Through a friend I was recruited to become a 'hedgehog hero' back in 2014. I absolutely recommend volunteering in the Royal Parks. It's interesting to educate yourself and enjoyable because you know you're contributing to a worthy project. Another fun thing is meeting people and making friends along the way."*

Tim Matthews is one of our citizen scientists. He first rolled up his sleeves to get involved with some hands-on science in the parks three years ago. Since then he's helped our prickly pals in Regent's Park as a 'hedgehog hero' and through our Mission: Invertebrate project.



# I. STRENGTHEN THE VOLUNTEER PROGRAMME

Volunteering has grown organically to meet the needs of particular projects and teams. This has led to a great range of volunteering roles and activities (50+), as well as ensuring our volunteers feel valued. However, it has also created some issues. TRP's data on volunteers is fragmented, policies and procedures are inconsistent, and our current communications focus on particular projects or roles rather than volunteering as a whole.

Strengthening the structure of the volunteer programme will ensure we know who, where and why people volunteer for The Royal Parks, enabling us to engage and involve volunteers more effectively and improve communications between and with volunteers. We'll also be able to support volunteers better, and more effectively identify and manage risks.

We will continue to work with partners to enable volunteering, giving more support on request and strengthening volunteer delivery directly as an organisation. Additionally we can incorporate the volunteering effort into securing more resources externally. By looking at the overall volunteer experience, we will ensure that volunteers remain connected to the charity and that The Royal Parks continues to be a brilliant place to volunteer.

Strengthening the programme and having a more consistent and 'joined up' approach will ensure we are in a good and stable position to support TRP's current volunteers, to grow the programme, and to monitor the positive impact volunteers have on the parks and all those that visit.

## To strengthen The Royal Parks volunteer programme we will:

- Develop a volunteer database and management system that is user friendly
- Review and revise our policies, processes and procedures affecting volunteers
- Develop a range of training and development opportunities for volunteers, partners, volunteer co-ordinators and staff
- Improve our communications with volunteers, ensuring it meets their needs and encourages dialogue
- Enhance the volunteering experience through recognition of impact, sharing best practice and supporting benefits

# 2. GROW AND DIVERSIFY THE VOLUNTEER BASE

We want to grow and diversify our volunteer base as we know that people and the parks will benefit from greater volunteer involvement. We recognise the wealth of skills and experience volunteers contribute to the parks, as well as the benefits that people gain from choosing to give their time to the Royal Parks for free.

We will support and appropriately grow volunteering within existing programmes, consolidating and promoting our offers to make it easier for new and current volunteers to find and view the opportunities available. We will improve our recruitment process ensuring that people are signposted to the most suitable roles and that registration is as quick and simple as possible.

It is important that our opportunities are accessible to all, and we aspire to diversify demographics ensuring that our volunteer team reflects the communities we work in. We also will provide more flexible and innovative volunteer roles that inspire people to get involved.

We want to make sure we are creating new ways for people to volunteer with us and inspire more volunteers to join and support us.

## To grow and diversify The Royal Parks volunteer base we will:

- Consolidate our current offers and simplify the recruitment and sign up process
- Explore and trial new flexible and innovative volunteer programmes based on nature, wellbeing, heritage and learning.
- Actively encourage and enable diversity and inclusion
- Seek to support volunteer projects beyond initial funding
- Continue to deliver 'Park Days' our corporate volunteer programme



10



*"I love the volunteering experience but would appreciate better communication from TRP about my own position as well as plans for my local Park"*

Volunteer Survey Respondent



*"The chance to get our hands dirty in the outdoors was a real treat, and a really rewarding experience for the whole team. To get out of our everyday roles and work together has been a huge collaborative effort and is already a source of immense pride. Giving back to an organisation as prestigious, and yet as accessible to all, as the Royal Parks is a wonderful opportunity – that's what makes it so meaningful to us."*

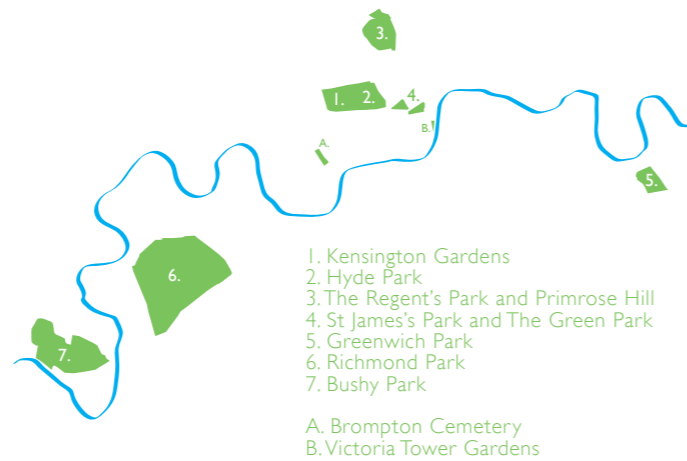
Benugo - a corporate volunteer partner



### 3. TRIAL A VOLUNTEER COMMUNITY RANGER SERVICE

With over 77 million visitors to the Parks there are many opportunities to engage, inspire and inform people, both Londoners and those from further afield. We receive much support from these visitors but sometimes the number and behaviours place extra pressures that are detrimental to the Parks and to our task of handing the Parks on to future generations in a better condition. We wish to trial a new service where volunteers help us in this task.

Starting in Richmond and Bushy Parks and to be followed by Greenwich Park we will initiate and develop a Volunteer Community Ranger Service, to give extra capability especially at busy times including weekends. Learning from the experiences of existing volunteers, stakeholders and Friends Groups we will create a training programme and recruit interested volunteers. This approach mirrors that delivered in some National Parks and we wish to match their success. We understand that this is a medium term project and not to be rushed as we want to get it right for the park, visitor and the volunteer. We will review and evaluate as the trial goes along.



#### To trial a Volunteer Community Ranger Service we will:

- Form an advisory group to help establish the service
- Develop a project action plan, working closely with key stakeholders
- Research and create an appropriate training programme
- Recruit the first tranche of Volunteer Community Rangers
- Review and evaluate the trial and seek further opportunities



#### DELIVERING THE ROYAL PARKS VOLUNTEERING STRATEGY

The strategy will be implemented through the delivery of a 3-year Action Plan which contains details of the key activities that will align our volunteer programme to our aims and objectives.

As 'living documents' the strategy and action plan will retain flexibility to respond to any new developments in the national landscape for volunteering together with emerging operational needs for the organisation.

The Royal Parks thank all the people and partners who have volunteered their valuable time, skills, knowledge and humour.

We hope we can achieve even more together!







FIND OUT MORE

[www.royalparks.org.uk](http://www.royalparks.org.uk)

CONTACT US

FOR VOLUNTEERING:

T. +44 (0)300 061 2279  
E. [volunteering@royalparks.org.uk](mailto:volunteering@royalparks.org.uk)

FOR GENERAL ENQUIRIES:

T. +44 (0)300 061 2000  
E. [hq@royalparks.org.uk](mailto:hq@royalparks.org.uk)

ALL WRITTEN CORRESPONDENCE  
CAN BE SENT TO:

The Old Police House  
Hyde Park  
London  
W2 2UH