



**Nature Towns
and Cities**



**How to set up a city-wide
volunteering programme**

Grow stronger together



Enable people and nature to grow stronger together by setting up a green space volunteering programme across your town or city.

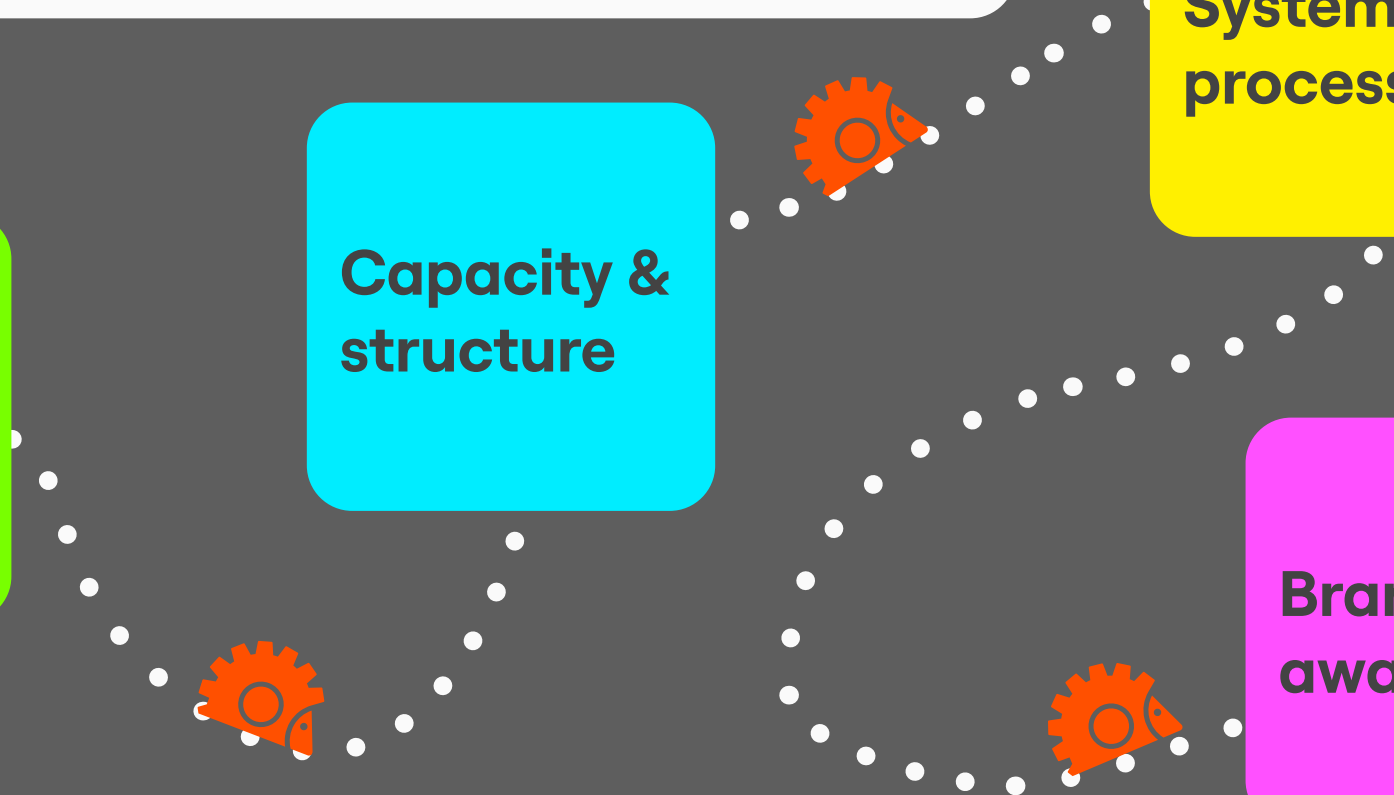
This guide has four stepping stones to help you establish a programme that works with your communities, with key action points and thought-starters along the way.

Strategy & approach

Capacity & structure

Systems & processes

Branding & awareness



Strategy & approach

This step helps you map out the big picture of what a volunteering programme could mean for your green spaces, what it might look like and how local communities could get involved.

Here's some key action points to get things started:

- Consider what you want to achieve by increasing volunteering activity in your green spaces:

Thought-starters

- Engage local residents.
 - Increase community pride.
 - Connect people with existing groups and networks.
 - Expand your local authority's focus.
 - Deliver even more activities in green spaces.
- Review your green infrastructure strategy or green space policies and ask how volunteering activity will help you deliver against these.
 - Review your existing green space volunteering and ask who is volunteering where and who is facilitating it.

The primary barrier to volunteering is not wanting to make an ongoing commitment

Time Well Spent 2023



60% of formal volunteers have volunteered for a third sector/civil society organisation, while just 23% have volunteered for a public sector organisation

Time Well Spent 2023

Strategy & approach *continued*

- Understand people's needs, motivations and barriers to volunteering:

Thought-starters

- Survey people who currently volunteer.
- Survey people who don't volunteer.
- Review any published research.

- Think of ways you can inspire people to get involved and overcome general barriers such as lack of time and awareness, and specific barriers such as a reluctance to volunteer for the local council.
- Decide if you want to lead the green space volunteering programme or collaborate with another organisation:

Thought-starter

- If you decide to collaborate, involve them in the strategic planning and programme set up processes.

- Compare different types of volunteering models and decide which work best for your needs. Research shows that different people and green spaces might need different models.

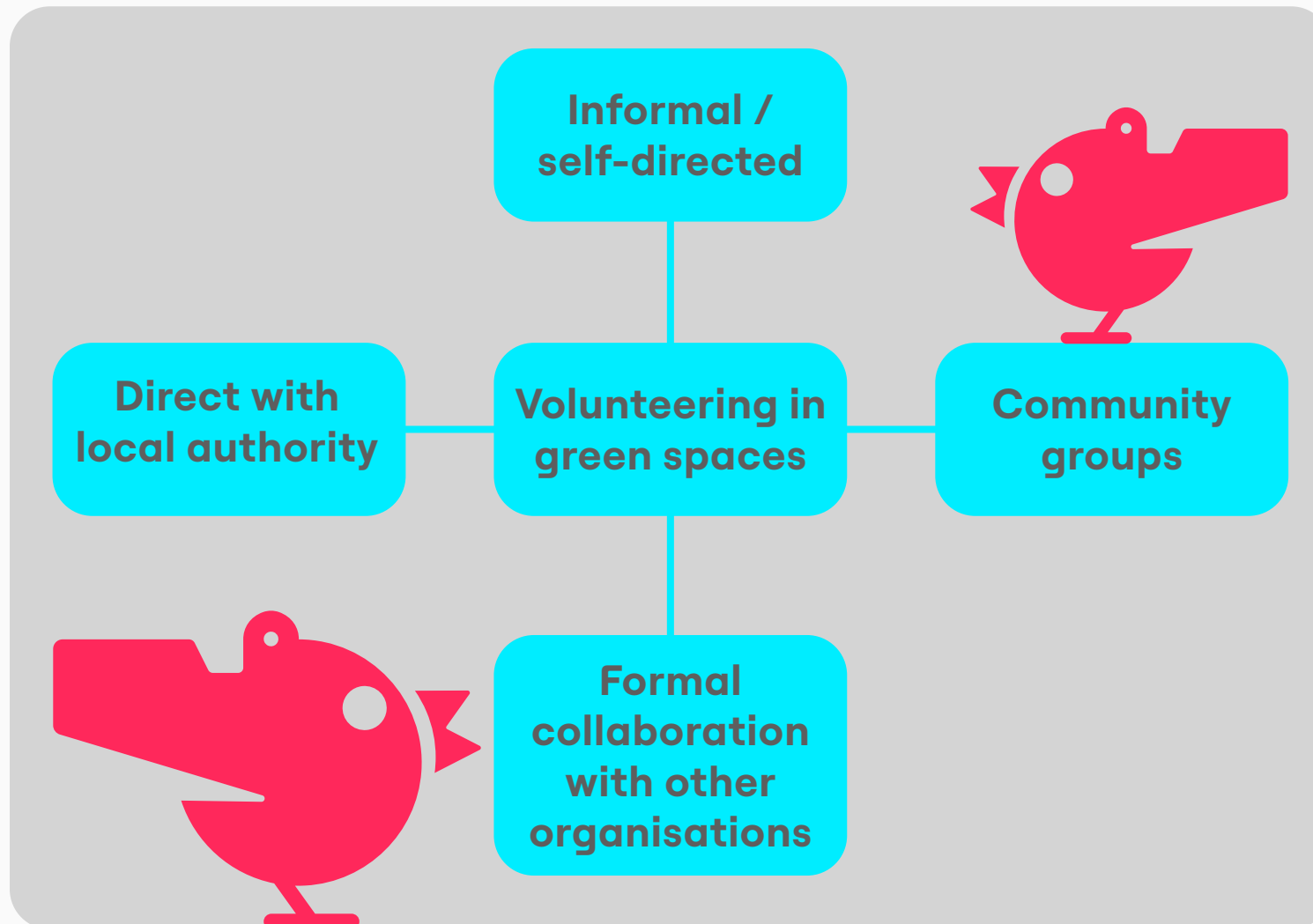


21% of people who considered volunteering but decided not to proceed say it was because it involved more time than they could commit

Time Well Spent 2023

Strategy & approach *continued*

Here's an example of the types of volunteering models you could bring together in a city-wide programme...



30% of people who don't volunteer say flexibility is key to them taking up a volunteering role

Time Well Spent 2023



44% of adults take part in informal volunteering at least once per year vs. 16% who take part in formal volunteering

Community Life Survey 2023/24

Capacity & structure

This step helps you focus on the internal construction and features of your volunteering programme, considering who can deliver it and what's needed to ensure its success.

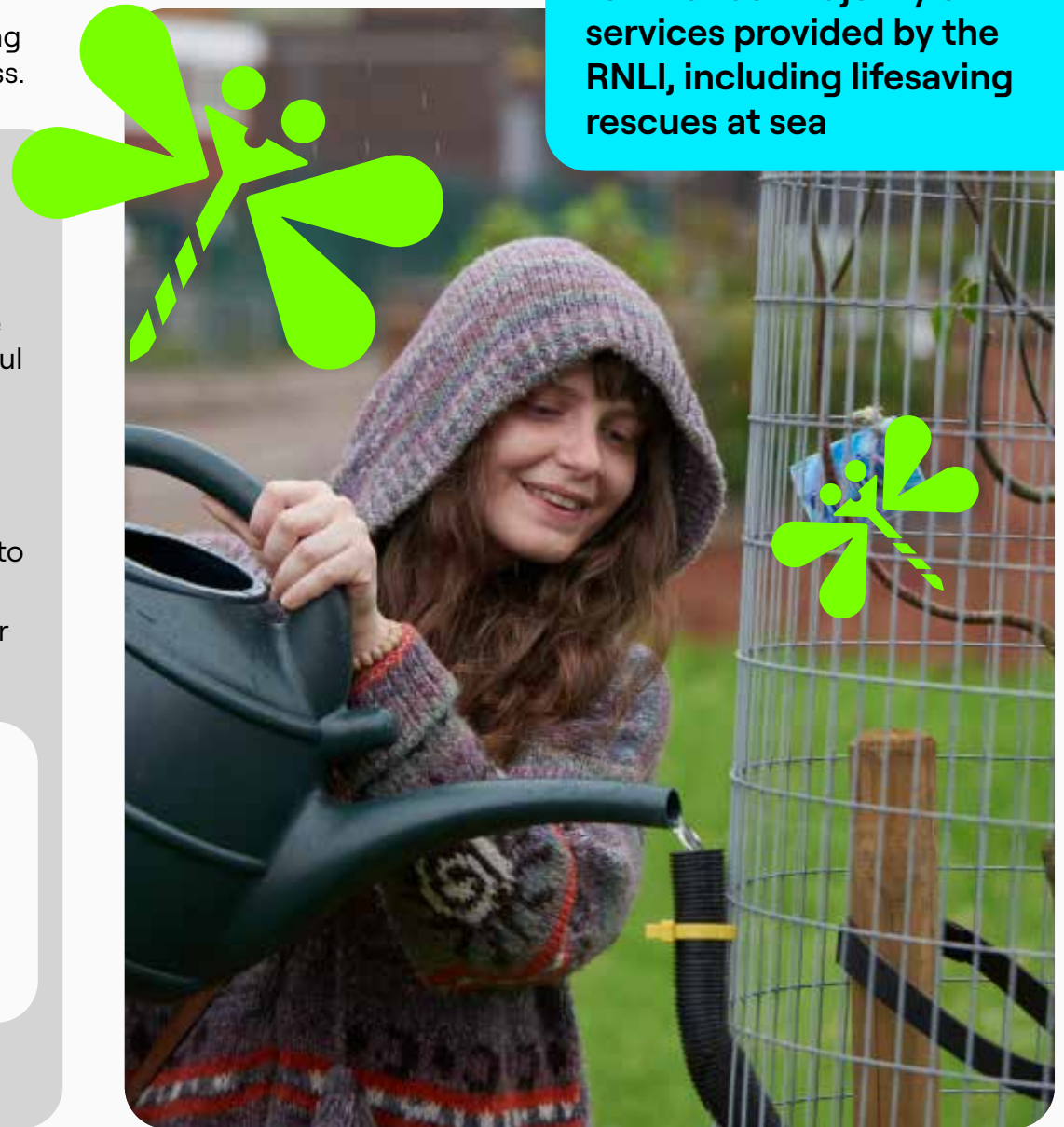
Here's some key action points to help it take shape:

- Consider what organisational and cultural changes are needed within your local authority to deliver a successful volunteering programme.
- Know what key performance indicators you'll use to measure these changes.
- Be realistic about how much you can achieve with volunteers and what other support systems you'll need to have in place.
- Consider what volunteer activities are needed to deliver mutual benefits for your local authority, stakeholders, communities and nature:

Thought-starters

- Needs-based (such as litter picking or weeding).
- Place-based (such as shrub pruning or specialist gardening).
- Project-based (such as tree planting or creating new features).

Volunteers are responsible for the vast majority of services provided by the RNLI, including lifesaving rescues at sea

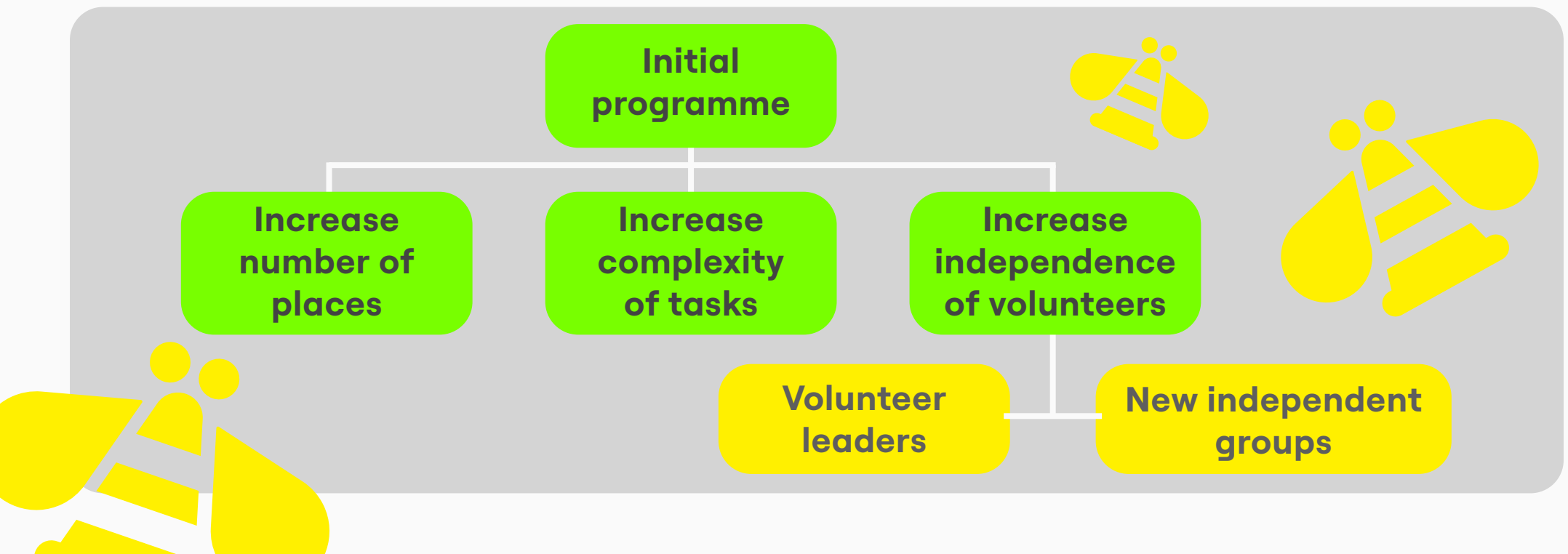


Capacity & structure *continued*

- Work out a management and training plan for both paid staff and volunteers. It's better to overestimate than underestimate the skills and time needed to set up and maintain your volunteer programme.
- Determine whether the person responsible for organising the volunteering programme is a new role or part of an existing role.
- Consider how the structure of your volunteering programme can align with the work of your green space team.
- Consider how to scale your programme.



Here's how a city-wide volunteering programme could scale up over time...



Systems & processes

This step helps you plot an accessible route across the volunteering programme, ensuring people, systems and processes are all connected, equipped and supported.

Here's some key action points to build those connections:

- Review existing volunteering activity within your local authority to find out which services already work with volunteers, what processes they use and what feedback they get.
- Ensure your current processes are able to engage and enable volunteers from different backgrounds:

Thought-starters

- Do they support people with mental and physical health needs?
 - How do they stand up against cultural barriers to volunteering?
 - Have you tested the process with your audience (it should be as easy as booking a gym slot)?
- Speak to enabling organisations that work with people from different backgrounds, cultures and with additional needs to enable you to really tailor your processes to your audience.



Less volunteers now feel their group includes a wide range of backgrounds and cultures

Time Well Spent 2023

Systems & processes *continued*

- Work out what health and safety procedures you need:

Thought-starters

- Risk Assessments (e.g. what activities can volunteers carry out and under what circumstances? What safeguards need to be put into place? How are risk assessments logged and monitored?)
- Insurance (e.g. what level of public liability insurance is required? Will volunteers drive vehicles on your behalf?).
- PPE (e.g. what safety equipment – such as hi-vis vests and gloves - do volunteers need?) .
- Training (e.g. what initial training do volunteers need? Which tasks require specialist training? How often do volunteers need refresher training?).

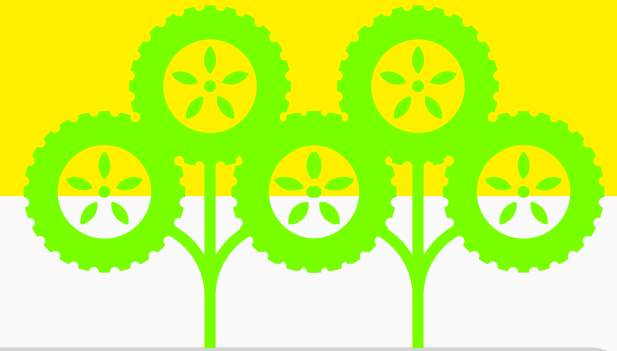
- Research volunteer management systems that will enable your volunteers to self-manage their volunteering, save you time and enable you to scale activity in the future:

Thought-starter

- Consider what the system does and how easy it is to use for both volunteers and administrators.



Systems & processes *continued*



Here's a great example from Nottingham Green Guardians...

What do they use?

A cross-service volunteer portal called [Assemble](#).

Who uses it?

The council and green space groups use it to promote opportunities in the same space.



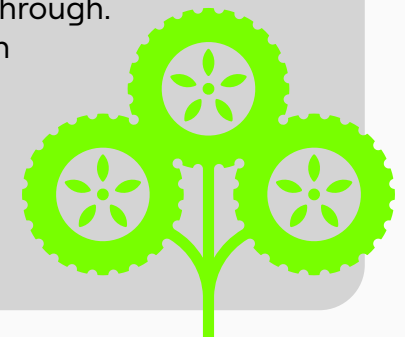
What can it do well?

It has a variety of modules to help you manage your programme:

- Volunteers – holds a database of your registered volunteers so they can be covered by necessary insurances.
- Roles – lists available volunteer roles, including responsibilities and code of conduct.
- Activities – details the current programme of volunteer activities.
- Calendar – includes one-off and recurring activities which can be matched and sent to suitable volunteers.
- Mobile app – allows the team to check on sign-ups when out and about, and volunteers to sign up to sessions.

What could it do better?

- Not all volunteers are comfortable registering this way – so allow extra team capacity to guide them through.
- Volunteers don't always sign up to each session they attend – so you may need manual records to monitor numbers.
- System cost depends on the number of volunteers signed up – so regular data cleanses are required.



"We find it saves time in the long run if we encourage prospective volunteers to join a session before they sign up to the system."

– Danni Green, Volunteer and Tree Planting Coordinator at Nottingham City Council.

Branding & awareness

This step helps put your volunteering programme on the map, giving it a clear identity with the right voice to attract, engage and retain volunteers for the long-term journey.

Here's some key action points to make your mark:

- Contact your existing communications and stakeholder engagement teams to benefit from their expertise and align your work.
- Discuss with them whether your volunteering programme should follow local authority branding or have its own distinct identity.
- Work with your audience to develop and test your branding ideas.
- Speak to your legal team about copyright checks and trademarking, if you're creating a new brand.
- Create a three to five-year stakeholder engagement and volunteer recruitment strategy to help prioritise your communications work.



Branding & awareness *continued*

- Create a six to twelve-month delivery plan that outlines how you will fulfil the strategy in the short-term:

Thought-starters

- Research events and activities where you're likely to meet potential supporters and volunteers.
 - Use websites, social media and newsletters to keep volunteers up to date and help new volunteers find you.
 - Think about how you will measure the success of your brand and awareness campaigns.
- Consider what resource is needed to deliver your plans and whether any tasks can be allocated to existing roles.
 - Think how to promote the new platform in the early stages before it is widely known. For example, what existing communication channels could you use?



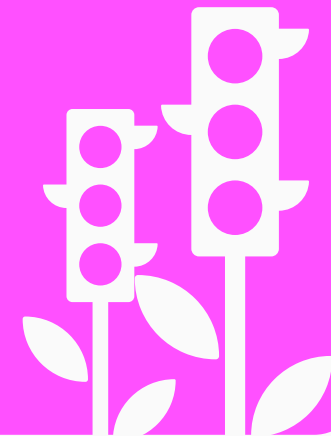
Here's a great example of the pros and cons of distinct branding from Nottingham Green Guardians...

Pros

- Enables volunteers to connect with the green spaces and strategy independently of the council by acting almost as an NGO.
- Allows volunteers to keep up to date and find new opportunities more easily through the separate website and social media.
- Softens any preconceptions that residents have about volunteering for their local authority.

Cons

- Gives impression of lack of corporate backing and support.
- Creates potential silos within the local authority.



Discover more about how Nottingham City Council has created a city-wide force for good on the [Nature Towns and Cities website](#).

If you require an alternative format, or if you have questions for the team behind this guide, please email us on info@naturetownsandcities.org.uk



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