

Effective volunteering programmes



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Research participants made clear that an effective way to engage local communities was direct support via volunteering programmes.

The consensus was that activity needs to be strategic and skills-based in order to increase local value and impact. There was also a feeling that volunteering policies need to become more embedded within organisations to have the greatest effect, with consistent support from across the industry to champion the importance of this work.

These insights align with the findings of the SSWG's dedicated workstream on volunteering across the rail industry. This sub-group has found stark variations in volunteering policy and low levels of activation and take-up. As a result, the group has reviewed current barriers to volunteering and presented a paper to DfT/GBR calling for greater recognition and standardisation of volunteering across the industry to unlock greater impact. An industry pilot using the OnHand volunteer platform is to be trialled as a potential way forward.

Desired and suggested elements of best practice included:

Develop a structured volunteering framework

- Implement clear volunteering pathways to help guide staff, such as:
 - Environmental enhancement: activities like conservation and station-based activities, e.g. maintenance, biodiversity schemes.
 - STEM and careers promotion: outreach in schools and communities to inspire future rail professionals.
 - Skilled volunteering: use employees' professional expertise (e.g. procurement, engineering) to support community needs.

Leverage internal campaigns and national events

- Prioritise strategic, locally impactful opportunities over ad-hoc volunteering.
- Focus on long-term relationships with communities near permanent and temporary work sites.

Align volunteering with strategic and local priorities

- Run targeted internal campaigns (e.g. during Community Rail Week, National Volunteer Week) to boost participation.
- Use these campaigns to mobilise large numbers of staff.



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Track and report volunteering activity

- Use an internal tool to log hours and locations of volunteering.
- Regularly report on total hours and outcomes to demonstrate impact.

Empower local CSR representatives

- Ensure all major sites have a CSR agent or representative to coordinate local efforts and act as a liaison.

Strengthen partnerships with community rail and other local community groups

- Use community rail and Community Rail Network as a key partner for social volunteering.
- Build relationships with community rail partnerships and station groups to co-develop projects, e.g. station-based projects.
- Improve communication of available support, resources, and funding to community partners.

Promote skilled and flexible volunteering

- Encourage staff to volunteer during non-productive time or through flexible arrangements.
- Match opportunities to employee skills to maximise value for both the community and the business.

Increase awareness and accessibility

- Address barriers such as lack of awareness and rota challenges.
- Promote the importance and benefits of volunteering internally to boost uptake.

Celebrate and communicate success

- Improve internal and external communication about volunteering successes.
- Share stories and data to build momentum and inspire participation across the industry.

Embed volunteering in industry strategy

- Advocate for a unified, industry-wide volunteering programme supported by DfT and Train Operating Company (TOC) business plans.
- Position volunteering as core to organisational sustainability objectives.

Highlight the broader benefits of volunteering

- Emphasise how volunteering:
 - Strengthens community ties and gives locals a voice.
 - Enhances station environments and supports sustainability.
 - Promotes social inclusion and economic development.
 - Improves employee wellbeing and engagement.
 - Builds trust and enhances the industry's reputation.



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“We want to promote skilled volunteering, not just additional labour. How can our knowledge and skills be used to deliver more impact for partners.”

“We need to get better at shouting about success and communicating impact across the industry – this will naturally increase interest and volunteering levels.”

“We are working to promote the importance of volunteering and matching opportunities to skills.”

“We try to direct staff into more strategic, local opportunities, rather than just ad-hoc activities. We want to increase local impact.”

Why are effective volunteering programmes important to the rail industry?

Effective volunteering programmes are increasingly important to the rail industry because they create meaningful connections between rail organisations, their workforce, and the communities they serve. A structured approach to volunteering helps ensure activities are purposeful and aligned with both strategic and local priorities. When programmes focus on long term community relationships, particularly around stations and rail corridors, they strengthen trust, enhance the passenger environment, and support social value commitments.

Volunteering also provides the industry with a powerful way to use its unique skills for public benefit. Skilled volunteering in areas such as engineering, procurement, or project management allows employees to apply their professional expertise to community challenges, delivering high impact support that few other sectors can offer. Complementary pathways, such as environmental enhancement or STEM outreach, help broaden participation while showcasing the rail industry’s contribution to sustainability and future workforce development.

Internally, strong volunteering frameworks boost employee wellbeing, pride, and engagement. Clear pathways, local CSR representation, and accessible opportunities help remove barriers to taking part, while celebrating success builds momentum across organisations. At an industry level, coordinated programmes with a movement such as community rail, supported by DfT and rail partners, can embed volunteering within wider sustainability and social impact strategies, reinforcing rail’s role as a community anchor.



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Case Study:

Siemens Mobility – Driving community impact through volunteering

Siemens Mobility has embedded volunteering into its culture, with all employees offered two paid days annually to support local communities, and all major sites having a dedicated CSR agent. In 2024, staff logged over 4,300 community volunteering hours, with strategic campaigns like Community Rail Week and National Volunteer Week mobilising 175 employees for 1,200 hours in just seven weeks. In 2025, the number of volunteering hours rose to more than 5,900.

The company's partnership with the Community Rail Network is central to its social impact strategy. By aligning volunteering with three key frameworks – environmental conservation, STEM education, and rail careers – Siemens ensures activities are both meaningful and locally relevant. Staff contribute skilled volunteering to community rail activities, and Siemens also offer their expertise on the board of Transwilt's CRP, the closest partnership to their large base at Chippenham.

Nationwide efforts during Community Rail Week 2025 included enhancing green spaces at Mauldeth Road Station in Manchester, supporting food-growing projects in Birmingham, and preserving the historic Poppleton Railway Nursery in York. These projects not only improve local environments but also create long-term relationships with community stakeholders.

Siemens' approach – tracking hours, promoting strategic themes, and encouraging skills-based volunteering – maximises social value and empowers employees to make a lasting difference. The collaboration with community rail exemplifies how corporate volunteering can strengthen local ties and support underrepresented groups while advancing sustainability and education goals.

