

Volunteering Motivations and Barriers Report

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Executive Summary

Volunteering is undergoing a significant transformation. The evidence reviewed in this report does not support the idea that people no longer wish to volunteer. Rather, it indicates that the desire to contribute remains strong, while the forms, expectations and conditions under which people are willing to engage have changed substantially. Across the resources examined, a common pattern emerges: traditional, formal, long-term volunteering is under pressure, while more flexible, episodic, hybrid, skills-based and informal forms of participation are becoming increasingly important. This shift predates the COVID-19 pandemic, but the pandemic accelerated it, exposing both the fragility of older volunteer models and the need for organisations to redesign the volunteering experience in ways that better reflect contemporary realities.

The motivational basis of volunteering remains broad but coherent. Altruistic and values-based motivations continue to occupy a central place across the documentary base. The desire to help others, serve the community, contribute to social change and act with civic or moral purpose appears consistently as the strongest and most widely shared driver. At the same time, the evidence makes clear that volunteering is rarely sustained by altruism alone. Personal and professional development, belonging, recognition, learning, emotional well-being and connection also play a significant role. Among younger people in particular, volunteering is frequently linked to employability, skills acquisition, credential value and the search for meaningful experience during transition to adult life. Among older adults, by contrast, volunteering tends to be more closely associated with social usefulness, active ageing, the transfer of experience and the search for continued purpose and connection after retirement.

The barrier structure is even more consistent than the motivational structure. Across both documentary inputs, lack of time emerges as the most recurrent and cross-cutting obstacle. This barrier is expressed through work demands, academic pressure, caring responsibilities, commuting, economic stress and wider competition for time in everyday life. Financial costs, transport, geographical distance and the absence of opportunities in underserved areas reinforce this pattern. Yet the documents also show that many barriers are institutional rather than contextual. Complex entry processes, slow responses to potential volunteers, unclear role descriptions, lengthy onboarding, bureaucratic cultures and inflexible commitment models all discourage participation. In several cases, the problem is not that people are unwilling to volunteer, but that organisations make it too difficult, too opaque or too demanding to begin.

The comparative analysis also reveals significant differences across segments. Age and life stage are the clearest dividing lines. Young people tend to respond to causes, social transformation, peer belonging and the promise of development, but they are also more exposed to unstable schedules, educational obligations, early career demands and uncertainty about where they will live or what commitments they will be able to sustain. Adults in active working life face the sharpest tension between volunteering, employment and care. Older adults often bring motivation, expertise and social commitment, but may encounter health, mobility and age-related barriers, as well as organisational models that do not make meaningful use of their experience. Women, persons with disabilities and socio-economically disadvantaged groups are repeatedly identified as facing unequal access, often because volunteering systems still reflect the assumptions, resources and habits of a relatively narrow “classic volunteer” profile.

A second major conclusion concerns the diversification of volunteering models. The evidence reviewed points to a marked rebalancing from long-term, role-based volunteering towards forms of engagement that are more modular, task-based and adaptable. Traditional volunteering

remains indispensable in many areas, especially where continuity, trust and relational depth are essential. However, episodic volunteering, digital and hybrid participation, skills-based contribution, family volunteering, student volunteering and micro-task models are increasingly relevant in expanding the pool of participants and making service compatible with contemporary life. These developments do not eliminate the need for structure; rather, they require better structure. Flexible volunteering is not the absence of organisation. On the contrary, it requires clearer role design, better communication, stronger management and more deliberate pathways of support and recognition.

For the Scout Movement, the implications are strategic and immediate. The evidence suggests that Scouting retains a distinctive strength as a space of belonging, civic formation, intergenerational connection and leadership development. It also suggests, however, that many of the barriers currently affecting volunteering more broadly are present within the Movement in acute form: excessive time demands, rigid role expectations, bureaucratic requirements, weak onboarding, poor alignment between volunteer roles and adult life realities, and limited flexibility for parents, specialists and young adults in transition. The challenge, therefore, is not simply to recruit more adults into existing structures, but to redesign those structures so that they remain safe, meaningful, inclusive and sustainable. For Adults in Scouting policy, this points towards adaptable pathways, better matching between skills and tasks, strong induction and mentoring systems, non-financial recognition, more intentional support for diversity and inclusion, and the creation of flexible forms of contribution that do not depend exclusively on the traditional model of long-term weekly commitment.

The report therefore starts from a simple but far-reaching proposition: the future of volunteering, including adult volunteering in the Scout Movement, will not be secured through nostalgia for older forms of service. It will depend on whether organisations are capable of preserving the ethical core of volunteering while redesigning its practical architecture. Where volunteering is meaningful, inclusive, well-supported, visible, flexible and respected, people continue to come forward. Where it is burdensome, invisible, poorly managed or disconnected from lived realities, they step back. The task ahead is not to persuade people that volunteering matters. The evidence already shows that they know it does. The real task is to build models of participation that honour both the cause and the conditions of those who serve.

1. Introduction

1.1 Purpose of the Report

This report examines the motivations and barriers that shape contemporary volunteering, with particular attention to their implications for organisational strategy and for the future of adult engagement in the Scout Movement. It has been prepared as a technical and analytical document intended to support institutional reflection, policy development and practical redesign of volunteering systems. Its purpose is not only descriptive. It seeks to interpret recurring patterns across the documentary base, identify where participation is expanding or contracting, clarify which barriers are most decisive, and extract operational lessons for strengthening volunteer recruitment, support, retention and inclusion.

The report draws on two complementary inputs. The first is a Scouting-focused synthesis of global and regional trends in volunteering, bringing together material from international reports, peer organisations, global dialogues, conference notes and internal reflections connected to volunteering in and around the Scout Movement. The second is a broader documentary research synthesis covering sources on volunteering motivations, barriers, segment-based differences, volunteering typologies and good practice across different populations and settings. Together, these documents make it possible to move beyond a narrow organisational reading and situate Scouting within a wider transformation affecting volunteering internationally.

1.2 Scope and Analytical Orientation

The scope of this report is documentary and comparative. It does not present primary empirical research conducted specifically for this exercise. Instead, it offers a structured reading of the evidence and arguments contained in materials from various sources. The report does not claim to establish causal relationships with the precision of a new field study, nor does it seek to homogenise all sources into a false consensus. Rather, it identifies common lines of convergence, highlights important tensions or contradictions, and distinguishes between strong recurring findings and more context-specific observations.

The central analytical questions that guide the report are straightforward but consequential. What motivates people to volunteer today? What prevents them from doing so, or from remaining engaged over time? How do these motivations and barriers vary across age groups, life stages and social profiles? What differences emerge between traditional, episodic, skills-based, digital and other forms of volunteering? Which organisational practices seem to support participation most effectively? And, crucially, what do these findings imply for the design of more flexible, inclusive and sustainable models of adult volunteering in Scouting?

1.3 Institutional Relevance of the Topic

The documents reviewed repeatedly underscore that volunteering is not a marginal or decorative activity. It is a foundational social practice that produces civic value, strengthens communities, supports services, develops people and sustains organisations. At the same time, the analysis shows that volunteering is frequently undervalued, poorly measured and insufficiently supported. This contradiction is one of the defining features of the current moment: societies and institutions continue to depend heavily on volunteers, yet the infrastructure, recognition and flexibility needed to sustain them often remain weak.

For organisations that rely substantially on volunteers, this creates a strategic imperative. Where organisations fail to understand what contemporary volunteers are seeking, what pressures they face and how access to volunteering is structured, they risk building systems that reproduce exclusion, fatigue and disengagement. By contrast, where volunteering is understood as a managed, supported and evolving form of participation, organisations are better able to align mission with contemporary social realities.

1.4 Relevance for the Scout Movement and Adults in Scouting

These issues are especially relevant to the Scout Movement. The strength of the Youth Programme, the safety of young people, the vitality of local groups and the consistency of organisational culture are all bound up with the availability, preparation, support and retention of adults who are willing to serve. For that reason, changes in the volunteering landscape are not external trends that Scouting may choose to observe or ignore.

The evidence suggests that Scouting faces a double challenge. On the one hand, it continues to benefit from a strong identity, a clear sense of purpose and a powerful tradition of belonging that can motivate engagement across generations. On the other hand, it is affected by the same structural and institutional barriers that are weakening participation elsewhere: time scarcity, economic pressures, rigid commitment models, bureaucratic entry processes, weak induction for new adults, and limited flexibility for people whose lives do not fit the assumptions of older volunteer systems. This report is therefore written with a forward-looking concern: how can the Scout Movement protect the strength of its core identity while adapting its adult engagement model to contemporary conditions?

2. Documentary Base and Analytical Approach

2.1 Nature of the Documents Reviewed

The documentary base is composed of two different but mutually reinforcing inputs. The first, focused explicitly on the Scout Movement, functions as a trend-oriented synthesis. It draws together references from international volunteering reports, Scouting dialogues, conference sessions, regional observations and selected examples from peer organisations to map common motivations, barriers and organisational challenges affecting volunteer engagement. The second input functions as a broader documentary research review. It presents a structured analysis of 22 sources, including systematic and scoping reviews, field studies, theses and conceptual frameworks covering diverse forms of volunteering, different populations and multiple regional contexts.

2.2 Coverage, Populations and Source Types

The material reviewed reflects broad geographical and thematic coverage, albeit with uneven density across topics. The research synthesis explicitly notes a global scope and refers to studies from Peru, Colombia, Algeria, Portugal, Sweden, the United States, the United Kingdom, New Zealand and Saudi Arabia, among others. The Scouting-oriented synthesis incorporates dialogue and case material from additional contexts, including Uruguay, Egypt, El Salvador, India, Palestine and other regional or global settings connected to volunteering debates. The populations covered include university students, working-age adults, parents, older adults, volunteers in emergencies, corporate employees, persons with disabilities, former scouts and adults considering or already engaged in volunteer service.

The source types are similarly varied. They include global reports, policy-oriented papers, organisational strategy documents, academic articles, survey-based studies, conference notes, documentary reviews and internal reflections. This breadth is both a strength and a limitation. It enables the report to identify broad recurring themes across different domains of volunteering, but it also means that not all evidence carries the same methodological weight. Some sources offer quantitative survey findings, others present qualitative dialogue insights, and others are more interpretive or programmatic in nature. For that reason, the report treats convergence across different source types as especially significant, while remaining cautious about claims that rest on isolated observations.

2.3 Comparative Reading and Cross-Document Synthesis

The analytical approach adopted here is a qualitative comparative synthesis. Rather than reproducing each source separately, this method privileges recurring themes, especially where they appear across both inputs and across different source families. Three organising principles guide the synthesis. First, segmentation matters. Motivations and barriers are not evenly distributed across age groups, life stages or social profiles. Second, volunteering models matter. Long-term role-based volunteering cannot simply be treated as equivalent to episodic, informal or digital participation. Third, institutional implications matter. The report does not stop at diagnosis but reads the evidence with explicit attention to what organisations, and the Scout Movement in particular, may need to redesign.

3. The Contemporary Volunteering Landscape

3.1 A Landscape in Transition

The evidence reviewed points to a fundamental transformation in the landscape of volunteering. The documents suggest that many adults and young people still want to contribute, but they want to do so in forms that are more compatible with fragmented schedules, multiple responsibilities, digital habits, shifting identities and changing expectations about work, community and personal development. In that sense, the current moment is not one of collapse, but of transition.

This transition is visible in the weakening of traditional formal volunteering, especially where it depends on fixed, long-term commitments and strong institutional routines. Several of the sources argue that the old assumption that a volunteer will give the same day each week over many years no longer corresponds to the lived realities of most people. Economic pressure, changing labour patterns, the expansion of caring responsibilities, increased mobility and the search for greater autonomy have altered what sustained volunteering can look like. The consequence is not indifference, but misalignment between inherited organisational expectations and current volunteer realities.

3.2 The Pandemic, Digitalisation and the Reordering of Participation

The pandemic appears throughout the documentary base as an accelerant rather than an isolated cause. It intensified existing trends towards flexibility, heightened the visibility of informal and community-based volunteering, and forced organisations to experiment with digital communication and remote forms of support. It also exposed the uneven resilience of volunteering systems. Organisations that were able to adapt rapidly to changing conditions often discovered new pathways for engagement. Others found themselves trapped between increased safeguarding requirements, reduced capacity, slower onboarding and weaker recruitment.

Digitalisation forms part of this same story. The documents describe both opportunity and tension. On the one hand, digital tools can widen access, reduce travel barriers, facilitate coordination and enable new forms of hybrid and online volunteering. On the other hand, digital expansion can deepen exclusion where there is poor connectivity, low digital confidence or limited access to devices and platforms. The evidence suggests that digitalisation is useful when it reduces friction, increases accessibility and supports meaningful contribution.

3.3 From Role-Based Permanence to Flexible Contribution

A central theme in both inputs is the growing importance of flexibility. This is not merely an operational preference; it is one of the defining features of the current volunteering landscape. Flexible volunteering refers to arrangements that allow variation in intensity, timing, role duration, location, task structure or degree of permanence. The documents suggest that people increasingly seek opportunities that can fit around professional responsibilities, family life, study, mobility or other commitments, rather than requiring those commitments to be reorganised around the volunteer role.

This shift has multiple implications. It makes episodic volunteering, short-term engagement, project-based collaboration, skills-based contribution and micro-task participation more attractive than before. It also requires organisations to become clearer about which roles genuinely require continuity, and which could be redesigned in more modular ways. The evidence implies that organisations often lose volunteers not because the cause is weak, but because the commitment model is too blunt. When all roles are structured as if they demanded the same level of permanence, availability and integration, many potential contributors are excluded unnecessarily. Flexibility, therefore, should not be understood as a dilution of commitment. Properly designed, it is an instrument for widening participation while preserving organisational integrity.

3.4 Changing Motivational Logics

The contemporary volunteering landscape is also marked by a shift in the way motivations are assembled. The evidence reviewed suggests that values remain central, but the motivational mix has become more multidimensional and more explicit. In earlier narratives of volunteering, altruism often stood alone as the morally acceptable reason to serve. The documents reviewed here paint a different picture. Today, volunteers often expect participation to be meaningful not only for the cause, but also for their own growth, connection, recognition and well-being. This is especially evident among younger generations, who often interpret volunteering through the combined lenses of purpose, identity, skill development and future opportunity.

This does not imply a moral decline. Rather, it suggests that contemporary volunteering is increasingly understood as reciprocal. People want to contribute, but they also want to know that their contribution matters, that it develops something in them, that it fits within their life and that it is recognised appropriately. The documents are particularly clear that volunteers, especially younger ones, are often drawn to visible impact, social transformation and mission clarity rather than to abstract loyalty to an institution. This has significant implications for organisations that rely heavily on identity, tradition or internal culture as a recruitment base. Where the mission is not translated into a compelling and intelligible proposition, organisations may fail to connect with groups who care deeply about service but do not yet identify with the organisation itself.

3.5 Exclusion, Recognition and the Uneven Architecture of Volunteering

A striking feature of the documentary base is its insistence that volunteering is not equally accessible to all. Economic constraints, transport, disability, geography, caring responsibilities, and organisational culture all shape participation unequally. The result is that volunteering systems may unintentionally privilege those who already possess time, confidence, networks, financial margin and cultural familiarity with organisational life. This is why the issue of enabling environments appears so forcefully across the documents. Volunteering flourishes not simply because individuals are generous, but because structures make generosity viable.

Recognition is another structural fault line. The documents repeatedly note that volunteering remains undervalued, under-measured and often treated as secondary or invisible, despite its social and organisational significance. This weak recognition has consequences. It affects public legitimacy, funding, infrastructure, policy support, internal morale and the way volunteers themselves understand their place in an organisation. Symbolic appreciation remains important, but the evidence suggests that symbolic appreciation alone is no longer sufficient. Recognition increasingly needs to be systematic, visible and linked to support, training, well-being, certification and institutional respect.

3.6 Strategic Reading for the Scout Movement

Read through a Scout Movement lens, the contemporary volunteering landscape contains both warning signs and major opportunities. The warning signs are clear: the Movement cannot assume that the traditional adult volunteer profile will replenish itself automatically; it cannot treat weekly long-term service as the only legitimate form of adult contribution; and it cannot expect that strong values alone will overcome practical barriers of time, money, bureaucracy or life-stage transitions. The opportunities are equally clear: Scouting already possesses many of the motivational assets that contemporary volunteers seek, including purpose, community, social impact, leadership development and intergenerational belonging. The strategic task is to ensure that organisational design catches up with motivational reality.

What emerges from the evidence is not a call for the Scout Movement to abandon its core model, but a call to differentiate it. Some functions will continue to require continuity, depth and long-term responsibility. Others could be redesigned around projects, short-term tasks, specialist contributions, digital support or episodic engagement. Some adults will remain committed through traditional pathways; others may only be able to contribute through more flexible routes. If the Movement can build a system in which these forms complement rather than compete with one another, it will be better placed to respond to current realities without losing its educational and ethical centre.

4. Motivations for Volunteering

4.1 Overview of the Motivations Identified

The documentary base shows that volunteering is sustained by a multi-layered motivational structure rather than by a single, uniform impulse. Across the sources reviewed, motivations are best understood as overlapping and cumulative: values-based commitment, desire for social impact, personal growth, belonging, learning, recognition and professional development frequently coexist within the same volunteer trajectory. This is one of the most consistent findings across both inputs. Volunteering is not reducible either to pure altruism or to narrow self-interest. It is more accurately understood as a form of civic and organisational participation through which individuals seek to contribute, connect and grow at the same time.

A second cross-cutting finding is that the relative weight of different motivations varies according to age, life stage, organisational experience and the way of volunteering opportunity available. However, the recurring presence of a values-oriented core remains striking. Even where volunteers also seek employability benefits, skills or recognition, the desire to be useful, to support others, to serve a cause or to contribute to community well-being remains highly visible. The documents therefore support an interpretation in which volunteering continues to be morally anchored, even as it becomes increasingly shaped by practical, developmental and relational considerations.

4.2 Values, Altruism and Service

The most recurrent motivational theme across the documentary base is the centrality of values. Volunteers are repeatedly described as being moved by solidarity, service, concern for others, social transformation and, in some cases, moral or religious duty. This values-based dimension appears across age groups and volunteering contexts, and it is presented in both inputs as the most universal and enduring driver of participation. Even where more instrumental motivations are also present, the desire to “do good”, “give back” or contribute to something larger than oneself remains a foundational element of volunteer engagement.

In analytical terms, this matters because it suggests that volunteering still depends on a credible moral proposition. People may respond to flexible structures, digital tools or formal recognition, but these elements alone are unlikely to generate meaningful commitment unless they are attached to a cause that is perceived as worthwhile. The documents therefore imply that organisations must continue to articulate clearly why the work matters, who benefits from it, and how volunteering contributes to the public good. Where this moral and civic framing is strong, other motivations are reinforced rather than undermined.

4.3 Sense of Purpose, Social Contribution and Impact

A closely related motivational cluster concerns purpose and impact. Volunteers do not only want to help in the abstract; they want to know that what they do makes a visible difference. Across the analysis, the search for meaningful contribution is presented as a major source of motivation, especially in contexts where individuals are invited to address community needs, contribute to social recovery, support education, strengthen civic life or respond to emergencies. The evidence suggests that volunteers are more likely to engage where they can see a plausible line between their effort and a tangible outcome.

This is especially significant in contemporary volunteering environments shaped by cause-oriented participation. The Scouting-focused synthesis notes that many younger volunteers are drawn more by causes than by loyalty to a specific institution. The broader documentary review similarly shows that many volunteers, especially young adults, value opportunities that allow them to act as agents of change and to connect their effort with wider social transformation. The motivational significance of purpose is therefore both ethical and strategic: organisations that fail to communicate the concrete social meaning of volunteer roles are likely to weaken recruitment, especially among those for whom cause alignment is more important than organisational tradition.

4.4 Belonging, Community and Social Connection

A further major theme is the motivational importance of belonging. Volunteering is repeatedly presented not only as an act of service but also as an opportunity to enter or sustain relationships, become part of a community, form friendships and experience social connection. The documentary base links volunteering with community cohesion, civic identity, reduced isolation and the building of trust across social boundaries. In practical terms, this means that volunteering often satisfies a relational need as much as a service-oriented one. People volunteer not only because they care about the cause, but also because they seek meaningful social participation.

This theme is particularly relevant to the Scout Movement. The material repeatedly highlights the role of group identity, community culture and a sense of “family” in sustaining participation. In some contexts, former scouts or adults already close to the movement appear easier to recruit precisely because volunteering is associated not only with service, but with belonging to a recognisable moral and social community. At the same time, this insight cuts both ways. The stronger the internal identity of an organisation, the greater the motivational benefit for insiders, but also the greater the risk of unintentionally excluding newcomers if belonging is coded too tightly around prior knowledge, symbols or relational history.

4.5 Personal Development, Well-being and Self-Esteem

The evidence also supports a strong developmental reading of volunteering. Volunteers frequently seek opportunities that allow them to grow, increase confidence, strengthen self-esteem, discover new capacities and experience a sense of usefulness. In several sources, volunteering is described as beneficial to mental health, emotional well-being and personal recovery. This is particularly visible in material relating to older adults and to volunteers seeking renewed purpose after illness, retirement or life transition, but it also appears among younger people in the form of self-discovery and confidence-building.

This developmental dimension should not be treated as secondary or morally suspect. The documentary evidence suggests that volunteers who feel that the experience enriches them personally are not necessarily less committed to the cause. Rather, the most sustainable forms of volunteering often seem to be those in which social contribution and personal benefit reinforce one another. Volunteering that is meaningful, socially connected and appropriately supported can generate a reciprocal dynamic in which the volunteer helps others while also experiencing purpose, growth and well-being.

4.6 Learning, Skills Development and Experience

Learning is one of the most visible motivations in the documentary base, particularly among young people and among those entering adulthood. The broader review identifies understanding, knowledge acquisition and skills development as central motivational categories, while the Scouting-oriented synthesis repeatedly notes that volunteers value opportunities to gain competencies, expand their experience and develop capacities that are transferable beyond the voluntary setting. These include leadership, teamwork, communication, problem-solving, project management and other soft and technical skills.

The significance of this finding lies in its implications for role design. If volunteering is experienced as a place where people can learn and apply knowledge, it becomes more attractive to wider segments of the population, especially younger adults and professionals seeking meaningful development outside paid employment. By contrast, where volunteer roles are poorly defined, repetitive or disconnected from volunteers' abilities and aspirations, this motivational resource is wasted. The evidence therefore supports the view that organisations should not fear framing volunteering as a site of learning; rather, they should do so more deliberately and honestly.

4.7 Employability, Career Value and Credential Recognition

Among the most important contemporary motivational shifts identified is the growing salience of employability and career value. This is especially evident among young people, students and early-career adults, for whom volunteering is often understood as an investment in human capital. The documentary review explicitly notes the importance of CV enhancement, work experience, networking and formal certification, while the Scouting-related synthesis also points

to young adults leaving or deprioritising volunteering when they feel that the recognition offered is insufficient in relation to their developmental needs.

The documentary base does not interpret this instrumental orientation as evidence of weakened civic commitment. Rather, it shows that for many individuals, especially those facing high educational or economic pressures, volunteering needs to carry intelligible developmental value in order to justify the time and financial cost involved. This is a critical point for institutions such as the Scout Movement. If adult volunteer engagement is to remain attractive to younger generations, then the Movement must take more seriously the formal recognition of competencies, the communication of transferable skills and the structuring of pathways that link service, leadership and personal development in credible ways.

4.8 Organisational Commitment, Mission and Group Identity

A further motivational factor emerging strongly from the broader documentary synthesis is organisational commitment: the emotional identification of volunteers with the mission, culture and collective identity of the organisation. This appears especially relevant where volunteers remain engaged over longer periods or in demanding environments. The documents suggest that when volunteers feel that they belong to a group with a clear mission and shared ethos, their commitment is more likely to deepen and endure. In the case of Scouting, this may be especially significant, since the movement offers not only volunteer tasks but a recognisable educational philosophy, a symbolic universe and intergenerational pathways of belonging.

At the same time, organisational commitment is not automatically available. It is built through experience, welcome, shared practice and perceived alignment between personal values and institutional reality. This means that mission-driven organisations cannot assume that their internal identity will motivate all potential volunteers equally. It may strongly sustain those who are already close to the movement, but it may be less effective for those outside it unless translated into accessible, cause-oriented and socially intelligible language. Organisational identity therefore functions as both a motivational asset and a communication challenge.

4.9 Tensions Between Altruism, Personal Benefit and Instrumental Value

One of the more nuanced contributions of the documentary base is that it refuses simplistic binaries between altruism and self-interest. Several sources suggest that volunteers often hold only a small number of genuinely decisive motivations, and that these may combine ethical, relational and instrumental elements. The documents also note that closed questionnaires may overestimate the diversity of motivations, whereas more open approaches reveal more focused motivational patterns. This suggests the need for caution in how motivations are categorised and interpreted.

The deeper analytical point is that contemporary volunteering is often justified through reciprocity. Individuals want to contribute to others, but they also want the experience to be worth the time, energy and cost required. This does not empty volunteering of moral value.

Rather, it reflects the fact that in more pressured, unequal and time-scarce environments, volunteering must increasingly prove itself both socially meaningful and personally viable. Organisations that continue to communicate volunteering only in sacrificial or idealised terms may fail to resonate with many potential participants whose motivations are sincere but more complex than older narratives allow.

4.10 Cross-Document Trends, Nuances and Contradictions

Taken together, the two inputs support four main conclusions regarding motivation. First, values remain the most universal and durable motivational anchor. Second, motivations are increasingly plural, with personal development, skills, belonging and recognition assuming greater visibility. Third, purpose and cause alignment have become more important than abstract organisational loyalty, especially for younger volunteers. Fourth, the motivational mix varies significantly by age, life stage and volunteering model.

The main nuance is that while the resources converge strongly on the importance of altruism and social contribution, they differ in emphasis regarding how far instrumental motivations now shape participation. The broader documentary synthesis presents employability, career value and credential acquisition as major motivations among younger groups. The Scouting-focused input confirms this trend, but places stronger emphasis on the continued importance of belonging, identity and cause-based engagement. These are not contradictory findings. Rather, they show that motivations vary not only across individuals but also according to how volunteering opportunities are framed and experienced. This is precisely why institutions need differentiated engagement strategies instead of relying on a single motivational narrative.

5. Barriers to Volunteering

5.1 Overview of the Barriers Identified

If motivations explain why people may wish to volunteer, barriers explain why many do not begin, do not remain, or reduce their engagement over time. Across both documentary inputs, barriers appear not as isolated obstacles but as an interacting structure of constraints. Time, money, transport, organisational complexity, lack of flexibility, weak support, exclusionary cultures and poor recognition frequently reinforce one another. This cumulative effect is one of the most important insights in the material reviewed: many potential volunteers are not blocked by one factor alone, but by the combined weight of several pressures that make participation feel impractical, inaccessible or unrewarding.

The documents also suggest that barriers should not be interpreted only at the level of individual limitations. Although some constraints are personal or contextual, many are produced or intensified by institutional design. In this respect, the evidence is particularly useful for policy and management purposes. It indicates that organisations cannot solve every structural difficulty volunteers face, but they can do much more to avoid creating unnecessary barriers of their own.

5.2 Lack of Time and Competing Work, Study and Care Responsibilities

Lack of time is the most consistent and widely reported barrier across the documentary base. It appears in both sources as the dominant cross-cutting obstacle, affecting nearly all volunteer segments though in different ways. For young people, time scarcity is linked to academic demands, examinations, coursework and early employment pressures. For adults in active working life, it is tied to workload, rigid schedules, commuting and family responsibilities. For older adults, time pressure may appear less through paid work and more through health management or caring for parents, grandchildren or other dependants.

The significance of time as a barrier goes beyond quantity. The documents show that it is often the inflexibility of time demands, rather than volunteering per se, that becomes decisive. People may be willing to contribute, but not within systems that assume regular availability over extended periods, or that escalate expectations once involvement begins. In this sense, time is not merely a private shortage; it is a structural point at which organisational models collide with contemporary life. This is especially relevant for Scouting, where adult volunteer roles can easily grow beyond their nominal scope and become difficult to reconcile with work and family life.

5.3 Financial Costs, Transport and Geographical Distance

Economic barriers appear almost as consistently as time barriers. The documentary base refers repeatedly to transport costs, food, equipment, registration, insurance, travel distance and the wider cost of unpaid time. These are not marginal issues. For many volunteers, especially younger people and those in lower-income contexts, participation requires trade-offs that are difficult to sustain. Several parts of the Scouting-oriented synthesis emphasise that volunteering “costs money to give back”, and that even when organisations do not charge high direct fees, the cumulative costs of movement, preparation and availability can still be prohibitive.

Geography deepens this problem. Opportunities are often concentrated in urban areas, while rural or underserved communities may face fewer accessible roles, longer travel times and weaker infrastructure. This means that volunteering systems can unintentionally reproduce territorial inequity. The implication is straightforward: if organisations want wider inclusion, they must treat financial and logistical barriers as core design issues rather than peripheral concerns. Flexible, local, hybrid and digitally enabled models can reduce part of this burden, but only if they are designed intentionally and supported adequately.

5.4 Low Awareness of Opportunities and Weak Visibility

One of the most revealing findings in the documentary base is that many potential volunteers do not participate simply because they do not know what opportunities exist, how to access them or what would be expected of them. The Scouting-related analysis cites evidence that low awareness of opportunities is one of the most important barriers to inclusion and access. The broader documentary review also identifies lack of clear information as a recurring institutional problem, especially for younger groups and new entrants. This suggests that the volunteering gap is not only a gap of motivation, but also a gap of communication and visibility.

This issue is particularly important for organisations with strong internal cultures. The more an institution relies on implicit knowledge, informal networks or inherited assumptions about how people join, the more likely it is to remain intelligible primarily to those already close to it. For the Scout Movement, this means that broad recruitment cannot depend only on reputation or internal invitation chains. Opportunities must be made visible in accessible language, through the right channels and with clearer pathways into participation.

5.5 Complex Entry Processes, Bureaucracy and Administrative Burden

The documents repeatedly identify bureaucracy as a major barrier. Potential volunteers are discouraged by lengthy application processes, vague or contradictory information, safeguarding procedures that are not clearly explained, slow responses from organisations, unclear role requirements and what is often described as “red tape”. This barrier is especially important because it sits precisely at the point of initial motivation: people who are willing to volunteer may

lose momentum or withdraw entirely if the route into service is confusing, delayed or overly formalised.

Bureaucracy may emerge for legitimate reasons, particularly around safety and safeguarding, but the evidence suggests that organisations too often fail to manage the tension between protection and accessibility. The issue is not whether screening, training or induction are necessary. The issue is whether these processes are coherent, proportionate, clearly communicated and responsive to the realities of volunteers' time and motivation. In the Scout context, this tension is especially visible where safeguarding systems become experienced as procedural overload rather than as part of a safe and enabling volunteer culture.

5.6 Limited Flexibility in Roles, Schedules and Commitment Structures

A decisive barrier identified is the lack of flexible volunteering options. Many volunteers do not reject service itself; they reject the assumption that service must always be long-term, role-bound, rigidly scheduled and organisationally absorbing. The Scouting-oriented synthesis makes this point strongly, noting that many adults want to volunteer differently rather than not at all. The broader documentary review reaches a similar conclusion when describing the shift from traditional long-term volunteering towards episodic and more adaptable forms of engagement.

This barrier is particularly significant because it is also one of the most alterable. Unlike wider labour market pressures or household income constraints, flexibility is an area where organisational redesign can have a direct effect. Where volunteer systems permit variation in intensity, duration, place and task structure, a wider range of people can participate. Where they do not, volunteering becomes accessible mainly to those whose lives already fit the inherited model. This is why the issue of flexibility runs through the documents not as a minor adjustment, but as a structural condition for future viability.

5.7 Fear of Incompetence, Lack of Confidence and Psychological Barriers

The documentary review identifies fear of incompetence, uncertainty about one's abilities and lack of confidence as important barriers, especially among young people and new volunteers. Individuals may hesitate because they fear they do not possess the required skills, may not understand expectations, or may not be able to perform well in unfamiliar environments. These concerns are intensified where organisations provide poor induction, weak mentoring or limited clarity about roles and support.

Psychological barriers are also linked to broader feelings of exclusion or not fitting in. In the Scouting-focused material, some adults report that the movement can feel insufficiently welcoming, particularly when symbols, traditions and close-knit adult cultures create the impression of an already closed world. This type of barrier is subtle but important. It reminds us that accessibility is not only material or procedural; it is also emotional and cultural. A volunteer

who feels unsure, out of place or underprepared may withdraw before formal engagement even begins.

5.8 Weak Organisational Welcome, Limited Support and Negative Experience

Both documentary inputs stress that poor organisational experience is a major retention problem. Volunteers may leave or decline to continue where they feel under-appreciated, unsupported, poorly guided or mismanaged. Conflicts with other adults, lack of clear induction, absence of follow-up, badly organised tasks and weak matching between the person and the role all appear as factors that undermine continued participation. The documents also show that volunteers are highly sensitive to early signals: a slow or indifferent response to an initial enquiry can be experienced as rejection and may discourage people from approaching other organisations as well.

This suggests that retention begins before volunteering formally starts. The quality of welcome, responsiveness, accompaniment and role clarity forms part of the barrier structure itself. In this regard, organisations should not assume that goodwill compensates for poor management. The evidence suggests the opposite. Where management is weak, even highly motivated volunteers may quickly disengage. For the Scout Movement, this point is especially important in relation to parents, new adults and individuals entering without prior scouting experience, since they are more dependent on a strong welcome and early support.

5.9 Safety, Safeguarding and Volunteer Well-being

The documents are unequivocal that safety, safeguarding and volunteer well-being are essential conditions of participation. In some contexts, risk is physical and acute, especially in crisis or conflict settings. In others, it concerns mental health, safe working conditions, insurance, exploitation, digital risk or institutional duty of care. The Scouting-related synthesis also highlights the difficulty of balancing robust safeguarding requirements with accessible and timely onboarding. This is one of the most complex institutional challenges in the material reviewed.

The analytical lesson is that safety can function simultaneously as an enabling condition and as a barrier, depending on how it is operationalised. Where safeguarding is well designed, clearly explained and adequately resourced, it builds confidence and supports inclusion. Where it is confusing, inconsistent or excessively burdensome, it delays participation and undermines motivation. The task for volunteer-involving organisations is therefore not to choose between safety and flexibility, but to build systems capable of holding both together without creating avoidable friction.

5.10 Accessibility, Inclusion and Participation Gaps

The material clearly indicates that volunteering is not equally accessible to all groups. Persons with disabilities face barriers related to physical accessibility, support staff and recruitment processes that are not adapted to their circumstances. Women often participate at high rates yet carry a disproportionate burden of care and time scarcity. LGBTQI+ communities and other marginalised groups may encounter implicit exclusion or insufficient institutional support. Language barriers, especially in countries with a high concentration of different linguistic communities, also pose barriers to inclusion when materials and communications are not translated or done so inconsistently. More broadly, the documents warn that volunteering systems often still reflect the assumptions of a narrow volunteer norm, typically associated with educated, middle-class and socially confident profiles.

This matters not only for fairness but for organisational effectiveness. Where volunteering remains structurally easier for some groups than for others, institutions lose potential talent, weaken legitimacy and risk reproducing social inequalities. Inclusion, therefore, is not an optional add-on to volunteer policy. It is part of the barrier structure itself. Accessible recruitment, adapted roles, explicit support systems and intentional outreach are necessary if volunteering is to become genuinely open rather than rhetorically so.

5.11 Lack of Interest versus Lack of Invitation

An important interpretive distinction running through the documents concerns the difference between genuine lack of interest and lack of invitation. Some sources identify limited interest as a barrier, while others argue that many people simply have not been directly asked, welcomed or shown where they might fit. The broader documentary review explicitly notes this tension, and the Scouting-oriented synthesis gives it additional weight through repeated references to weak visibility, slow recruitment responses and the need for active invitation strategies.

This distinction has major practical implications. If low participation is read only as lack of interest, organisations are likely to focus on persuasion or broad promotional messaging. If, however, non-participation often reflects lack of invitation, then relational recruitment, peer outreach, mentoring and direct engagement become much more important. For the Scout Movement, where social connection and community entry are central, this suggests that recruitment should be more intentionally personal and less dependent on passive waiting for volunteers to self-present.

5.12 Cross-Document Trends and Critical Drop-Out Factors

Taken together, the documents support five broad conclusions regarding barriers. First, lack of time is the dominant and most universal obstacle. Second, financial cost, transport and geography remain major access constraints. Third, low awareness and poor visibility prevent many people from even considering participation. Fourth, bureaucracy, weak onboarding and rigid structures are major institutional barriers that organisations themselves can and should

address. Fifth, inclusion and accessibility remain unfinished agendas, with significant consequences for who is able to volunteer and under what conditions.

The most important drop-out factors appear to arise where these barriers intersect. Volunteers are especially likely to withdraw where time demands are high, the role lacks flexibility, the onboarding process is burdensome, and the experience does not provide sufficient meaning, support or recognition to justify continued commitment. This is why effective volunteer policy must treat barriers systemically rather than one by one. The challenge is not simply to remove individual obstacles, but to design an overall experience in which motivation is not steadily eroded by friction.

6. Segmentation by Relevant Characteristics

6.1 Rationale for Segmentation

The analysis makes clear that motivations and barriers are not evenly distributed across populations. A segmented reading is therefore necessary if the analysis is to remain useful for policy and organisational design. Age, life stage, gender, socio-economic position, disability, geography, care responsibilities and previous organisational background all influence how volunteering is understood and experienced. However, the evidence is not equally dense for all variables. Age and life stage emerge as the strongest and clearest axes of variation, while other dimensions such as gender, disability and socio-economic status are discussed with varying degrees of depth.

The purpose of segmentation in this report is not to produce fixed categories of volunteers, but to identify relevant differences in the conditions of participation. This allows organisations to move away from one-size-fits-all assumptions and towards more differentiated volunteering pathways. It also helps clarify where inclusion gaps are likely to appear, and where particular groups may require tailored recruitment, support or role design.

6.2 Differences by Age Group and Life Stage

Age and life stage provide the clearest segmentation across the material. The broader documentary review distinguishes between young people, adults in active working life and older adults, while the Scouting-focused synthesis adds further specificity around early-adult transition, especially in relation to leaving home, entering university, starting work, marrying or forming a family. These transitions matter because they alter not only availability but also motivational logic.

Young people tend to be drawn by causes, learning, employability, peer belonging and opportunities for self-development. Adults in active working life are more likely to combine civic motivation with concerns about balance, usefulness and the practical reconciliation of volunteering with work and family demands. Older adults are often motivated by giving back, staying active, contributing experience and maintaining connection after retirement. In other words, the life course shapes both the moral and practical meaning of volunteering. More details on volunteering motivations by life stage are found in the next section.

6.3 Differences by Gender

Gender appears in the documentary base as an important but less fully elaborated dimension. The broader documentary synthesis notes that women often show higher participation rates while also facing greater constraints due to caring responsibilities and time pressure. The Scouting-related synthesis adds that young women are not always equally encouraged into leadership roles, and that gender-inclusive volunteer development requires more deliberate support, especially in contexts shaped by patriarchal norms.

Although the evidence does not provide a complete comparative motivational model by gender, it is sufficient to indicate that volunteering cannot be treated as gender-neutral in practice. Care burdens, access to leadership, safety concerns and organisational culture all shape participation unevenly. This implies that volunteer systems concerned with equity must look beyond aggregate participation and examine how time, authority, recognition and support are distributed across gendered experience.

6.4 Socio-Economic Context and Educational Level

Socio-economic context is another important segmentation axis, particularly in relation to barriers. The broader analysis notes that higher educational levels tend to correlate with higher participation, while lower socio-economic groups face greater difficulty because of transport costs, resource limitations and the need to prioritise paid work. The Scouting-oriented synthesis reinforces this by repeatedly stressing the financial cost of volunteering and the need to avoid systems that privilege only those who can afford the expense of giving time.

The evidence here is stronger on access barriers than on motivational differentiation. It would be too strong to claim, on the basis of the documents alone, that lower-income volunteers are motivated in fundamentally different ways. What can be said with confidence is that socio-economic inequality conditions whether and how people can act on their motivations. In practical terms, this means that volunteering systems may appear open while in fact being more available to those with greater financial margin, schedule control and social capital.

6.5 Disability, Accessibility and Organisational Readiness

Disability appears in both documentary inputs primarily through the lens of access and organisational readiness. The broader documentary review identifies major barriers related to support staff, accessibility and organisational design. The Scouting-focused synthesis also refers to the exclusion of persons with disabilities from many volunteer opportunities and stresses the need for more inclusive systems.

This is an important reminder that inclusion is not achieved simply by declaring openness. Accessible recruitment, adapted role design, physical and digital access, and supportive accompaniment all matter. The evidence does not yet provide a highly detailed profile of motivations among disabled volunteers across contexts, but it is strong enough to show that

many barriers currently interpreted as low participation may be failures of organisational adaptation. For volunteer-involving organisations, including the Scout Movement, this points towards the need for more proactive and better resourced accessibility planning across the whole volunteering journey.

6.6 Urban, Rural and Underserved Contexts

Geographical setting also shapes access to volunteering. The documents repeatedly note that opportunities are more visible and available in cities, while rural and underserved communities may face fewer openings, longer travel distances and weaker infrastructure. Informal volunteering may remain strong in such contexts, but formal volunteering opportunities are less evenly distributed. This creates a distinction between willingness to contribute and the practical opportunity to do so in ways recognised by organisations.

For the Scout Movement, this has clear operational significance. If adult recruitment strategies assume stable urban density, transport access and existing institutional visibility, they may fail in areas where adults would have to travel significantly, absorb higher costs or operate with less local support. A geographically sensitive volunteering model would therefore need to recognise the value of local adaptation, digital supplementation and smaller-scale forms of contribution compatible with different territorial realities.

6.7 Family Responsibilities, Employment Situation and Previous Organisational Background

The analysis also point to a set of variables that cut across demographic categories. Caring responsibilities are especially important, not only for parents of young children but also for adults caring for elderly relatives or grandchildren. Employment situation matters likewise: students, international students, early-career adults and those in unstable work face different availability patterns from those in later or more secure career stages. The Scouting-related synthesis adds that previous organisational or scout background makes a major difference, since adults with earlier links to Scouting often enter more easily and interpret volunteering through pre-existing relational and symbolic frames.

This suggests that segmentation should not be reduced to formal demographic categories alone. Life conditions, prior experience and relational proximity to the organisation may be just as decisive. In the case of Scouting, former scouts, parents of current members and skilled adults with no previous scout background are likely to require different recruitment messages, onboarding strategies and role configurations. Treating them as a single adult volunteer category would obscure important differences in both motivation and need.

6.8 Comparative Synthesis Across Segments

Across the documentary base, three conclusions stand out from the segmented analysis. First, age and life stage remain the most robust explanatory factors in how motivations and barriers are configured. Second, socio-economic position, gender, disability and geography operate less as separate motivational worlds than as structuring conditions that enable or constrain access to volunteering. Third, previous proximity to the organisation materially shapes whether volunteering feels familiar, desirable and achievable.

The more an organisation understands how motivations and barriers vary across profiles, the better it can create pathways that are workable in practice. That principle is especially important for the Scout Movement, where the future of adult engagement will depend not on a single volunteer archetype, but on the capacity to welcome and sustain a more diverse ecology of contributors.

7. Age-Based Analysis

7.1 Young People

7.1.1 Main Motivations

The analysis shows that young people tend to approach volunteering as a space of transition, preparation and identity formation. Their motivations are often more openly developmental than those of other age groups. Alongside values-based commitment and a genuine desire to contribute to a cause, young volunteers place strong emphasis on employability, CV enhancement, learning, practical experience, networking and the acquisition of transferable competencies. Volunteering is therefore often interpreted not only as service, but as a bridge between education, civic participation and future professional life.

This does not mean that young people are less ethically committed than older volunteers. Rather, the evidence suggests that values and instrumentality are more explicitly intertwined in this group. Young volunteers want to act with purpose, but they also want their participation to be relevant to their lives, development and aspirations. They respond strongly to opportunities that offer tangible impact, visible contribution, peer connection and meaningful personal growth. In several contexts, they are also drawn by academic requirements, service hours or formal certification, which may function as an initial trigger even when longer-term engagement later becomes more values-driven.

The Scouting-focused material adds a further nuance: many younger volunteers are more strongly motivated by causes than by institutional attachment as such. This means that recruitment strategies aimed at youth are more likely to resonate when they emphasise social transformation, community impact and active citizenship rather than assuming pre-existing loyalty to an organisation. Within Scouting, this has particular relevance for attracting young adults who may share the Movement's values but do not necessarily respond to traditional narratives of role permanence or inherited institutional identity.

7.1.2 Main Barriers

The barriers affecting young people are especially concentrated around time, uncertainty and cost. Academic workload, examinations, study pressure, early employment demands and unstable routines all make long-term commitment difficult. In addition, young people often face financial constraints that make transport, equipment, food and unpaid time harder to absorb. This is why volunteering opportunities that appear low-cost from an organisational point of view may still be experienced as expensive from the perspective of a student or an early-career young adult.

The evidence also suggests that young people are especially vulnerable to poor organisational design at the point of entry. Lack of clear information, vague role expectations, slow or weak responses from organisations, fear of incompetence and limited induction can all discourage participation. Where volunteering feels unclear, irrelevant or disconnected from tangible outcomes, disengagement tends to happen quickly. This is significant because it indicates that

attrition among young volunteers is not only a result of competing priorities, but also of avoidable institutional friction.

Within the Scout Movement, the documentary material repeatedly identifies an “age gap” affecting young adults in transition. Many leave when they move for university, start work, marry or begin family life, as uncertainty about future location and available time makes long-term volunteer commitments harder to sustain. At the same time, the same documents show that this pattern is not universal: in some national contexts, young teachers or former scouts continue to support local groups. This suggests that disengagement is not inevitable, but conditional upon the relationship between volunteer expectations and life-stage realities.

7.1.3 Strategic Implications

The clearest strategic implication is that organisations, including the Scout Movement, need youth volunteering pathways that are flexible, developmental and visibly meaningful. Young adults are more likely to engage where they can apply knowledge, acquire recognised skills, contribute to causes they value and see that their effort has concrete effects. Recruitment messaging therefore needs to connect service with social impact, leadership growth and credible developmental value, rather than treating these elements as secondary or implicit.

The evidence also strongly supports short-term, episodic and modular formats for this age group. Where volunteering opportunities are structured around projects, micro-tasks or time-limited commitments, they are more compatible with academic cycles, mobility and uncertain schedules. Digital recruitment and management channels are especially important here, both because they match the communicative habits of younger cohorts and because they reduce friction in the first stages of engagement. Strong onboarding and mentoring are likewise essential, since they reduce fear of incompetence and help convert initial interest into sustained participation.

For Scouting in particular, the implication is not simply to “keep young adults involved”, but to redesign how continued involvement is made possible. A model that assumes uninterrupted continuity from youth membership into adult weekly leadership will continue to lose people unnecessarily. A more realistic approach would offer layered pathways: direct leadership for some, project-based contributions for others, skills-based support for others, and re-entry options for those who step back during periods of transition and later wish to return.

7.2 Adults in Active Working Life

7.2.1 Main Motivations

Adults in active working life tend to combine civic commitment with a more pragmatic orientation to how volunteering fits within the wider architecture of their lives. Their motivations often include values, community connection, social responsibility, the wish to make a useful contribution, and the opportunity to apply professional or personal competencies in meaningful ways. They are also more likely than younger volunteers to interpret volunteering through the lenses of local relevance, responsibility to others and life balance rather than through explicit employability gains.

At the same time, this group does not volunteer only out of obligation or duty. The documentary base shows that adults in mid-life can be strongly motivated by the opportunity to use their expertise effectively, expand networks, model civic values for their children, or experience emotional well-being through service. In some cases, workplace culture also plays a role, particularly where employers support volunteering through paid leave, timetable adjustments or Corporate Social Responsibility frameworks. These motivations suggest that for working-age adults, volunteering is most attractive when it feels both socially worthwhile and proportionate to the realities of professional and family life.

The evidence therefore supports a reading of working-age adult volunteering as purposeful but highly conditional. Motivation is often present, but participation depends heavily on whether the organisation can offer clear roles, reasonable expectations, visible usefulness and a degree of flexibility that respects adult responsibilities. This is particularly relevant in volunteer-reliant movements such as Scouting, where adult participation is often assumed rather than actively redesigned around contemporary life patterns.

7.2.2 Main Barriers

For adults in active working life, the barrier structure is especially intense. The documents consistently identify time pressure, work demands, commuting, caring responsibilities and the need to prioritise paid employment as the most significant obstacles. Volunteering may be perceived not as a desirable extension of civic life, but as an additional burden placed on already overloaded schedules. This is particularly acute where organisations assume regular, high-intensity or indefinite commitments.

Institutional barriers are also especially important for this group. Adults with little available time are highly sensitive to bureaucracy, slow entry processes, unnecessary meetings, role ambiguity and weak organisational responsiveness. When the cost of volunteering is already high, administrative inefficiency becomes more than an inconvenience; it becomes a reason not to begin or not to continue. The broader documentary synthesis also notes “alarm fatigue” in high-demand or emergency settings, where repeated notifications and competing requests erode willingness over time.

A further barrier for this segment concerns perceived usefulness. Adults who bring professional expertise are less likely to remain engaged if the role assigned does not make meaningful use of their capacities or is experienced as insignificant, repetitive or poorly aligned with their competencies. In such cases, the problem is not lack of goodwill but a mismatch between the volunteer and the task. This is a crucial management issue because it suggests that adult retention depends not only on motivation and flexibility, but on intelligent role allocation.

7.2.3 Strategic Implications

The documents point clearly towards more flexible and differentiated participation models for working-age adults. Organisations that continue to rely predominantly on long-term, role-heavy, weekly commitment structures will struggle to recruit and retain adults whose lives are already shaped by work and care intensity. The appropriate response is not to lower standards indiscriminately, but to create pathways that allow adults to decide the degree, timing and format of their involvement more realistically.

Micro-volunteering, task-based roles, episodic engagement, hybrid participation and skills-based contributions are particularly relevant for this group. These models reduce travel and time costs, make better use of adult expertise, and allow organisations to draw on a wider pool of contributors without forcing all adults into the same commitment structure. Formal recognition of competencies is also important, since many adults value visible acknowledgment that their voluntary effort contributes not only to the cause but also to their own professional or personal trajectory.

For the Scout Movement, the implication is direct and far-reaching. Busy adults are not mainly deterred by lack of values alignment; they are deterred by excessive bureaucracy, inflexible expectations, weak role clarity and the sense that volunteering will consume more time and energy than they can responsibly offer. A credible Adults in Scouting strategy must therefore include flexible role design, simplified onboarding, strong matching between skills and responsibilities, and explicit recognition that episodic or specialist contributions can strengthen rather than weaken the Movement when properly coordinated.

7.3 Older Adults

7.3.1 Main Motivations

Older adults emerge from the documentary base as a segment with substantial but often underused volunteer potential. Their motivations are less shaped by employability and more by meaning, social usefulness, active ageing, connection and the desire to contribute from experience. Volunteering offers many older adults an opportunity to remain socially engaged, maintain self-esteem, avoid isolation and continue exercising competencies that have accumulated over the course of their lives.

The broader documentary review also shows that older adults often seek opportunities to transfer knowledge, mentor others and contribute in ways that are ethically meaningful rather than instrumentally advantageous. In some contexts, this is linked to moral conviction, faith, connection to nature or a desire to leave a legacy. What matters analytically is that older volunteers are not best understood as simply “available time”. They are motivated by significance, dignity, recognition and the opportunity to remain active participants in community life.

For organisations such as the Scout Movement, this suggests that older adults can be an especially valuable source of mentoring, institutional memory, strategic support and stable commitment, provided that roles are designed in ways that acknowledge their strengths rather than assuming a one-dimensional form of participation. Where older adults are invited into meaningful roles and treated as contributors of expertise rather than as auxiliary labour, the motivational base appears strong.

7.3.2 Main Barriers

The barriers affecting older adults differ in structure from those affecting younger or working-age cohorts. Health limitations, reduced mobility, transport difficulty, care responsibilities within extended family networks and uncertainty about where to begin all appear as significant obstacles. These barriers are often practical, but they are also reinforced by external perceptions.

The analysis identifies ageism as a relevant factor, including the sense that organisations may prefer younger volunteers or underestimate the adaptability and competence of older people.

Institutional inflexibility is especially problematic here. Older adults may be strongly motivated to participate, but less willing or able to enter systems that demand fixed schedules, long-term permanence, extensive travel or physically intensive tasks. Where organisations fail to provide alternative routes such as mentoring, advisory, administrative or project-based roles, they effectively exclude a group that could otherwise make a substantial contribution.

The evidence therefore suggests that low participation by older adults should not be read simply as reduced interest. In many cases it reflects a mismatch between the design of volunteer opportunities and the life conditions of the people being asked to fill them. This distinction is important because it moves the issue from the realm of demographic inevitability into the realm of organisational choice.

7.3.3 Strategic Implications

The strategic case for engaging older adults is strong. The documents suggest that organisations should build experience-based programmes and roles that make visible use of the professional, relational and civic capital that older volunteers bring. This includes mentoring, strategic leadership, project guidance, training support, governance, advisory contribution and other forms of volunteering that do not depend primarily on high physical mobility or intensive weekly availability.

Flexibility in timing and mode of involvement is especially important. Project-based roles, episodic participation, virtual or hybrid opportunities and localised forms of service can all widen access for older adults while maintaining meaningful contribution. Equally important is the creation of social environments in which volunteering includes spaces for connection, friendship and shared purpose. For this segment, belonging is not merely a by-product of volunteering; it is often part of the reason for volunteering in the first place.

For the Scout Movement, older adults may represent an important strategic reserve if the Movement is willing to widen its understanding of what adult contribution can look like. Rather than forcing all volunteers into the same leadership-intensive pathway, Scouting could expand mentoring, training, governance, advisory, administrative and intergenerational support roles that allow older adults to contribute at different levels of intensity. This would not only support inclusion but also strengthen continuity, institutional memory and adult accompaniment across the Movement.

8. Good Practice for Attracting, Integrating, Supporting and Retaining Volunteers

8.1 General Principles

Across the two inputs, the strongest lesson is that sustainable volunteering depends on a combination of clarity, welcome, flexibility, support, recognition and meaningful contribution. Good practice begins before a person formally becomes a volunteer and continues through recruitment, onboarding, task allocation, development, well-being support and retention.

A second general principle is that good practice must be differentiated rather than generic. Different groups require different pathways into service, and different ways of volunteering require different management approaches. The same process will not work equally well for a university student, a parent with little free time, an older mentor, a skilled specialist or a potential volunteer from a group that has not historically felt represented. Effective systems are therefore those that combine consistent principles with adaptable routes into participation.

8.2 Communication and Recruitment

The documents consistently show that communication and recruitment must move beyond generic appeals to goodwill. Recruitment is more effective when it combines clear cause-based messaging with an honest account of what the role involves, why it matters and what the volunteer may gain from the experience. The broader documentary review recommends diversified messages that speak both to social impact and to personal benefit. The Scouting-oriented synthesis similarly stresses that many contemporary volunteers, especially younger ones, respond more readily to mission, transformation and visible contribution than to abstract institutional loyalty.

Visibility also matters. Many adults do not volunteer because opportunities are not sufficiently visible, understandable or accessible. This means that organisations need more intentional communication through appropriate channels, language that is inclusive rather than insular, and clearer explanations of the types of contribution available. Recruitment should not assume that potential volunteers already know how the organisation works or where they fit.

8.3 Active Invitation Strategies

One of the clearest practical lessons is that direct invitation matters. Several parts of the broader documentary review note that many people do not participate simply because nobody has actively asked them. This finding is echoed in the segment analysis for young people and older adults, where invitation emerges as a distinct lever of engagement.

Good practice, therefore, includes active invitation strategies rather than passive dependence on self-recruitment. This can involve peer ambassadors, direct approaches through schools or universities, personalised engagement with parents, outreach to former volunteers, and targeted invitations to adults with specific competencies. For the Scout Movement, where belonging and personal trust are especially important, such relational recruitment is likely to be more effective than distant or purely generic promotion.

8.4 Role Clarity and Volunteer Value Proposition

A recurring problem in the documentary material is that potential volunteers are discouraged by vague expectations and poorly defined tasks. Good practice therefore requires role clarity from the outset. Volunteers need to understand what they are being asked to do, what level of commitment is expected, what support will be available, and how their contribution connects to wider organisational purpose. Without this clarity, even motivated individuals may hesitate or withdraw.

Role clarity is also linked to what may be called the volunteer value proposition. Organisations need to be able to state plainly why a particular volunteering opportunity is worth a person's time. This includes social impact, learning, belonging, recognition and practical feasibility. Where organisations fail to articulate this proposition, volunteering is more likely to appear as undefined labour rather than meaningful participation.

8.5 Clear, Accessible and Agile Onboarding

Onboarding emerges from both documentary inputs as a decisive site of either conversion or loss. Good practice requires induction processes that are clear, proportionate, timely and accessible. This means explaining requirements well, avoiding contradictory messages, reducing unnecessary procedural burden and ensuring that the prospective volunteer receives a prompt and respectful response. The Scouting-related synthesis specifically notes that slow responses can cause potential volunteers to feel rejected, and that even a brief acknowledgement can help sustain engagement.

The analysis also suggests that onboarding should not be reduced to compliance alone. It should include welcome, orientation, clarification of expectations and early relational support. In some cases, organisations have found value in allowing prospective volunteers to visit, observe or participate informally before full formalisation. This is especially helpful for people who are unsure, neurodivergent, new to the culture of volunteering or unfamiliar with the organisation.

8.6 Flexible Role Design and Modular Participation Pathways

Flexibility is one of the strongest good-practice themes across the entire documentary base. Good organisations do not assume that every volunteer can give the same kind of time or sustain the same kind of commitment. Instead, they offer different levels of participation, short-term and long-term routes, and roles that can be shaped around varying life conditions. This includes episodic roles, project-based contributions, digital and hybrid formats, and micro-task options that reduce the cost of entry.

What distinguishes good practice here is not only the existence of flexible roles, but the intentional design of pathways between them. Volunteers should be able to move between different forms of contribution over time, increasing or reducing intensity as life circumstances change. For the Scout Movement, this principle is especially important because adults often move in and out of availability across the life course. A pathway model allows continued belonging without forcing all contributors into a single, rigid pattern of service.

8.7 Training, Mentoring and Accompaniment

The documents repeatedly emphasise the importance of training and support, particularly for new volunteers. Good practice involves more than initial information transfer. It includes mentoring, accompaniment, accessible learning, role-specific preparation and continuing development. Such support reduces fear of incompetence, strengthens confidence and improves early retention, especially among young people, parents and adults entering without prior experience of the organisation.

The Scout-related synthesis also points towards buddy systems, mentor structures and more deliberate accompaniment as useful elements of volunteer support. This is a particularly important lesson for Scouting, where adult roles often involve complex culture, educational responsibility and safeguarding obligations that can feel overwhelming without relational guidance. Where accompaniment is absent, even motivated adults may conclude that the role is not for them.

8.8 Recognition, Validation and Non-Financial Incentives

Recognition appears across the documentary base as both a retention factor and a matter of institutional justice. Volunteers want to feel that their contribution is seen, valued and appropriately acknowledged. Good practice therefore includes frequent positive feedback, visible appreciation, celebration of contribution, and mechanisms for recognising the specific competencies and effort involved in volunteering. The broader documentary review explicitly recommends competency certificates, academic credits and other non-financial forms of validation.

The analysis also suggests that recognition should move beyond symbolic gratitude alone. Systemic recognition may include certification, progression pathways, public legitimacy,

supportive policy frameworks and clearer organisational acknowledgment that volunteering is skilled, valuable and worthy of investment. This is especially relevant for younger adults and skilled professionals, for whom recognition helps justify the costs of participation, but it is also important for long-term retention more broadly.

8.9 Wellbeing, Self-Care and Prevention of Exhaustion

Wellbeing is presented in the documents not as a secondary concern but as part of what makes volunteering sustainable. Good practice includes attention to emotional support, workload balance, self-care, manageable expectations and protection against burnout. This is particularly important in high-intensity settings and in volunteer roles that generate repeated demands, alert fatigue or emotional strain.

Within the Scout Movement, this principle has direct operational implications. If adult volunteering is organised in ways that steadily expand responsibility without corresponding support, people are likely to leave not because they reject the cause but because the role becomes unsustainable. Good practice therefore requires organisations to manage expectations from the outset, distribute tasks more intelligently, rotate responsibilities where necessary and ensure that volunteers experience their time as valued rather than extracted.

8.10 Inclusion, Accessibility and Diversity of Profiles

The documentary base is clear that good practice must include active work on inclusion. This means more than rhetorical commitment to diversity. It requires accessible recruitment processes, adaptation for people with disabilities, attention to the realities of low-income participants, use of inclusive language, and stronger representation of different profiles within volunteer programmes. The documents also suggest that organisations need to be explicit about why equity, diversity and inclusion matter to the quality of volunteering itself, not only to the organisation's public image.

For the Scout Movement, this is an especially important area of opportunity. The material reviewed suggests that under-represented groups may remain underserved where volunteer pathways are built around narrow assumptions of time, money, familiarity and organisational culture. Good practice therefore includes widening the kinds of roles available, reducing unnecessary barriers, building targeted support where needed and ensuring that new adults can enter without feeling like cultural outsiders.

8.11 Professional Volunteer Management

One of the strongest institutional themes in the Scouting-oriented synthesis is that volunteer management needs to be recognised as a skilled and properly resourced function. Good practice does not rely on goodwill alone. It depends on competent coordination, clear systems,

appropriate follow-up, adequate tools and organisational commitment to the volunteer journey as a strategic priority. Where volunteer management is treated as an add-on or residual administrative burden, support and retention deteriorate.

Professional volunteer management is especially important in diversified volunteer systems. The more an organisation offers long-term, episodic, digital, skills-based and other forms of participation simultaneously, the greater the need for structured matching, communication, supervision and pathway management. For the Scout Movement, this is a key point: flexible volunteering cannot succeed if the management model remains designed only for traditional roles.

8.12 Use of Digital Tools and Support Platforms

Digital tools can support good practice in multiple ways: widening visibility of opportunities, simplifying communication, reducing travel requirements, facilitating hybrid participation and easing some logistical burdens. In this sense, digitalisation can strengthen recruitment, onboarding and ongoing coordination when it is used to reduce friction rather than increase it.

At the same time, digital tools are not neutral solutions. Good practice requires that their use be safe, accessible and proportionate. The documents stress that digital volunteering and online coordination must be accompanied by attention to safeguarding, accessibility and the digital divide. For organisations such as the Scout Movement, this means using digital platforms as enabling supports within a wider relational model, rather than as substitutes for meaningful accompaniment or organisational care.

8.13 Good Practice for Retention and Continuity

Across the two documentary inputs, retention appears to depend less on any single intervention than on the overall coherence of the volunteer experience. Volunteers remain where their initial motivations are respected, where their role feels meaningful and manageable, where they receive support and recognition, and where the organisation responds intelligently to changes in life circumstances. Attrition, by contrast, often follows the accumulation of small frictions: unclear roles, excessive bureaucracy, lack of flexibility, weak welcome, poor matching, insufficient appreciation and gradual overload.

The central lesson for policy and management is therefore simple, though demanding: retention is not achieved by asking for more commitment from volunteers, but by building volunteering systems that are worth remaining in. For the Scout Movement, this means protecting what is strongest in its culture—purpose, belonging, service and intergenerational formation—while redesigning the experience so that adults can participate in ways that are safe, meaningful, sustainable and aligned with their lives. That is the real horizon of good practice suggested by the evidence.

9. Infrastructure, Investment and Enabling Conditions for Volunteering

9.1 Investment in Volunteer Support, Management and Capacity Building

The documentary base is unusually clear on the question of investment. Strong volunteering outcomes do not emerge from goodwill alone. They require support systems, management capacity, training, accessible processes and resources that make participation viable. Several of the sources referenced in the Scouting-oriented synthesis stress that volunteer safety, well-being, management and capacity building are among the most urgent areas for investment, and that volunteer-involving organisations often struggle precisely because these dimensions remain underfunded or underdeveloped.

This has major implications for institutional strategy. If organisations invest in recruitment campaigns while neglecting onboarding, role matching, training, follow-up and volunteer management, they are likely to create churn rather than sustainable engagement. The evidence reviewed suggests that investment should first strengthen the experience, protection and support of existing volunteers and improve organisational practice before assuming that expansion alone will solve participation shortages. In other words, retention and infrastructure are not secondary to recruitment.

Within the Scout Movement, this point is particularly sharp. The available material indicates that many National Scout Organizations already have policy alignment in Adults in Scouting, but substantially fewer report flexible schemes, role-adapted training systems, competency-based management systems or structured evaluation of volunteer satisfaction. This gap suggests that the issue is no longer whether adult volunteering matters in principle, but whether organisations are investing adequately in the systems required to sustain it in practice.

9.2 Recognition, Visibility and Public Legitimacy

A further enabling condition identified is recognition. The documents call for a broad shift from symbolic recognition to systemic recognition. This includes recognition through policy, funding, institutional visibility, public discourse, research and integration of volunteering into local, national and global development strategies.

This point is crucial because weak recognition affects more than morale. It shapes whether volunteering is understood by decision-makers as worthy of investment, whether volunteer roles are seen as skilled or merely auxiliary, whether organisations can justify support systems, and whether new volunteers perceive their participation as socially valued. The documents also warn that informal and community-based forms of volunteering are especially vulnerable to invisibility, even though they may represent a large share of actual contribution. Recognition, therefore, is

not only about honouring volunteers; it is about making volunteering legible as a serious and necessary social practice.

For Scouting, public legitimacy matters in two directions. Internally, adult volunteers need to feel that their effort is seen, protected and validated. Externally, the wider community, employers, educational institutions and public authorities need to recognise that volunteering in Scouting produces educational, civic and social value rather than merely maintaining an internal tradition. Without that broader legitimacy, it becomes harder to build partnerships, justify flexibility, attract adults and secure support.

9.3 The Role of Governments, Civil Society and the Private Sector

The documentary material consistently presents volunteering as a shared-responsibility field. Governments, civil society organisations, communities and the private sector all have a role in creating enabling environments for volunteer participation. This does not mean that all actors contribute equally or in the same manner. Rather, it means that volunteering is strengthened when infrastructure, policy, protection, visibility and resourcing are not left to individual organisations alone.

The evidence gives particular weight to public authorities. Several of the referenced dialogues and surveys note that local and national governments are perceived as key stakeholders in funding, policy support and the creation of enabling conditions. At the same time, the documents also note an important tension: public promotion of volunteering can sometimes be viewed with suspicion if people fear that volunteering is being used to replace paid labour. This tension does not invalidate public support, but it does mean that the political framing of volunteering must be handled carefully, with clear emphasis on complementarity, dignity, protection and non-exploitative practice.

The private sector also appears as an important actor, especially in relation to employee volunteering, resource mobilisation and formal recognition of staff time dedicated to service. Likewise, civil society networks are presented as key intermediaries for advocacy, coordination, learning and support. For the Scout Movement, this reinforces the value of partnership thinking: adult volunteering will be easier to sustain where Scouting can build coherent relationships with employers, educational institutions, community groups and public bodies that reduce barriers and widen recognition.

9.4 Measuring the Value and Impact of Volunteering

Another major theme is the need for stronger evidence and measurement. Several of the sources argue that volunteering remains under-measured and that this weakens its visibility and bargaining power. Decision-makers, especially in constrained economic contexts, often require data on impact, value and return on investment. Where such data are absent, volunteering is more likely to be treated sentimentally rather than strategically. The documents therefore call for stronger research, clearer tools and more systematic ways of assessing the social, economic and developmental contribution of volunteering.

This is not a purely technical concern. Measurement influences whether organisations can advocate effectively for resources, whether volunteer management can be strengthened, whether different forms of contribution are recognised, and whether institutional leaders can make informed choices. The documents also suggest that some practitioners feel discomfort about assigning monetary value to volunteering, fearing that this may distort its meaning. Yet the material repeatedly argues that the absence of evidence has practical consequences: it leaves volunteering vulnerable to underinvestment and misunderstanding.

For the Scout Movement, better measurement is not only desirable but necessary. If Scouting wishes to strengthen Adults in Scouting policy, diversify participation models and make a stronger case for support, it will need clearer evidence on volunteer motivations, attrition patterns, satisfaction, contribution types, competency gains and the social value generated by adult involvement. Without that evidence, strategy risks remaining aspirational rather than operational.

9.5 Enabling Environments for Sustainable Volunteer Engagement

Taken together, the documents suggest that an enabling environment for volunteering has at least six core elements: institutional recognition, adequate investment, clear and proportionate systems of management, safety and protection, inclusive access, and differentiated participation models. None of these conditions on its own is sufficient. When one is missing, the others become less effective. Volunteers may be highly motivated, but without safety and support they may leave. Organisations may be value-driven, but without investment and management their systems become fragile. Roles may be meaningful, but without flexibility and inclusion they remain accessible only to a narrow minority.

The most important conclusion is therefore that volunteering flourishes where structures make contribution viable. The documentary evidence suggests that organisations strengthen volunteering by building the conditions under which generosity, skill, commitment and belonging can be sustained. That principle is central to the following chapter, since the question for the Scout Movement is not whether volunteering remains valuable, but how to build an environment in which adult volunteering can remain both possible and strong.

10. Implications for the Scout Movement

10.1 Why These Findings Matter for the Scout Movement

The documentary base leaves little room for ambiguity: the current transformation in volunteering has direct and strategic implications for the Scout Movement. Scouting depends fundamentally on adult volunteers for educational continuity, safeguarding, local programme delivery, mentoring, governance and institutional cohesion. This means that broad changes in how people understand volunteering, what they expect from it and what barriers they face are not external trends of marginal relevance. They affect the Movement's capacity to function, grow and remain educationally credible.

The evidence also suggests that Scouting occupies a distinctive position within the broader volunteering field. On the one hand, it benefits from strong motivational assets: a clear mission, community belonging, intergenerational culture, leadership development and visible educational purpose. On the other hand, it is also exposed to some of the sharpest structural risks identified in the documents: adult time scarcity, bureaucratic burden, rigid role expectations, weak entry pathways for newcomers, and insufficiently flexible participation models. The Scout Movement is therefore not outside the current volunteering transition.

10.2 Flexibility, Adaptable Pathways and New Participation Models

One of the strongest implications emerging from the documents is that the Scout Movement needs a more diversified architecture of adult participation. The material is explicit that episodic volunteering, micro-tasking, project-based contribution and specialist roles can help widen access for parents, professionals and adults whose lives do not permit continuous weekly leadership. The evidence does not suggest replacing traditional roles wholesale; it suggests building adaptable pathways around them.

This implies a shift from a predominantly role-based model to a mixed model. Some adults will continue to take on long-term section leadership or local governance responsibilities. Others may contribute as trainers, advisers, project volunteers, event supporters, safeguarding specialists, communications helpers, digital coordinators, short-term mentors or occasional technical contributors. The point is not to lower organisational seriousness, but to allow adults to contribute according to capacity, life stage and skill profile.

Such a model would also help the Movement respond more intelligently to fluctuating availability over the life course. Adults may intensify their participation at one stage and reduce it at another without severing their relationship to Scouting altogether. An adaptable pathway model therefore strengthens continuity by recognising discontinuity. That is a critical institutional insight.

10.3 The Age Gap and Loss of Continuity in the Transition to Adulthood

The “age gap” identified in the Scouting-oriented synthesis is one of the most important findings for the Movement. In many contexts, young adults disengage when they leave home, begin university, start work, marry or form families. The documents interpret this not as a simple erosion of values, but as a collision between life-stage instability and long-term volunteer expectations. The broader documentary review supports this by showing that young people face particularly acute barriers related to time, uncertainty, cost and the need to prioritise education or paid work.

Young adults may not always be able to sustain full leadership roles at that moment, but they may still be willing to contribute episodically, digitally, by project, by event or through specialised tasks. Additionally, re-entry should be normalised rather than treated as exceptional. Adults who step back during periods of study, career formation or family change should have clear ways to reconnect later without being treated as having abandoned the Movement. A volunteering system that can absorb both exit and return is better aligned with contemporary realities than one that only recognises uninterrupted permanence as success.

10.4 Task-Based and Episodic Contributions in Scouting

The material analysed strongly support the expansion of task-based and episodic contribution models within Scouting. Adults with limited time may still be willing to offer finance support, communications help, training input, project coordination, digital assistance, safeguarding expertise, logistics, event support or mentoring. Likewise, parents or community members may be more able to contribute in bounded, clearly defined moments than through open-ended leadership roles.

This is especially important because it allows the Movement to retain seriousness while widening access. Episodic or micro-task contributions are not inherently superficial. They become superficial only if the organisation fails to coordinate them well or fails to connect them to a meaningful shared purpose. Properly designed, they can reduce pressure on long-term leaders, bring in new capacities and serve as first steps into deeper engagement for some adults.

The implication for Adults in Scouting policy is that role taxonomy matters. The Movement needs a clearer architecture distinguishing continuity-dependent leadership functions from specialist, project, episodic, digital and advisory contributions. Without such differentiation, flexibility will remain rhetorical and adult recruitment will continue to be funnelled into formats that many cannot sustain.

10.5 Onboarding, Mentoring and Buddy Systems for New Adult Volunteers

The documentary material repeatedly indicates that new adults need stronger accompaniment. Lack of induction, limited mentoring, weak welcome and uncertainty about how to begin are recurring barriers in both inputs. The broader documentary synthesis recommends clearer onboarding and sustained support, while the Scouting-focused material explicitly refers to the value of buddy systems and mentoring arrangements for new volunteers.

This is particularly important in a movement with a strong internal culture. Adults entering Scouting without prior experience often need help decoding norms, symbols, safeguarding expectations, educational methods and organisational rhythms. Even parents whose children are already members may hesitate if they do not see clearly how they can help or fear not being competent enough to do so. A well-designed onboarding system therefore functions not merely as information transfer, but as cultural translation and relational reassurance.

A robust adult strategy should consequently include staged entry, role clarification, early accompaniment, buddy or mentor support, manageable first tasks and clear follow-up. This would reduce avoidable dropout at the point where interest is most fragile and institutional burden most visible.

10.6 Recognition, Competency Certification and Volunteer Pathways

Recognition emerges as one of the most promising areas for strengthening adult volunteer retention in Scouting. The broader documentary review recommends certificates, academic credit and competency recognition, while the Scouting-focused material argues that formal recognition of the competencies gained through the Movement can add value for professional and personal trajectories. This is especially relevant for young adults and skilled professionals, but it also matters more broadly for adults who want their contribution to be seen as distinctive, valuable and real.

This suggests that recognition in Scouting should move on two levels. At the interpersonal level, volunteers need frequent appreciation, positive feedback and visible acknowledgement. At the structural level, the Movement should strengthen formal pathways that recognise leadership, safeguarding competence, project management, mentoring, training and other capacities developed through service. Such recognition helps connect volunteer contribution to identity, belonging and progression rather than leaving it as invisible labour.

Volunteer pathways also matter. Adults are more likely to remain where they can see possible routes of contribution and development that make sense for their skills and circumstances. Pathways should therefore include not only progression upwards into heavier responsibility, but lateral movement into different forms of service and the possibility of adjusting intensity over time.

10.7 Inclusion and Access for Under-Represented Groups

The evidence reviewed suggests that the Scout Movement has significant room to strengthen inclusion in adult volunteering. Persons with disabilities, low-income groups and others whose profiles do not fit the “classic volunteer” norm may face compounded barriers of cost, access, weak representation and organisational assumptions. The broader documentary synthesis explicitly identifies underserved groups and the need for adapted opportunities, while the Scouting-focused material stresses the importance of creating more diverse teams and reducing exclusionary effects.

The implication is not simply to recruit more “different” adults while leaving the structure unchanged. Inclusion requires adaptation of the offer itself: accessible roles, support mechanisms, clearer communication, flexible pathways, reduced financial burden and more intentional outreach to groups that may not currently see Scouting as a realistic place for adult participation. The challenge is therefore structural rather than cosmetic.

This also has mission significance. A more inclusive adult volunteering system would not only widen the Movement’s capacity base; it would strengthen the credibility of Scouting as an educational movement committed to participation, equity and community relevance across diverse social realities.

10.8 Implications for Adults in Scouting Policy

The documentary base points towards several clear implications for Adults in Scouting policy. First, policy should explicitly recognise differentiated volunteering pathways rather than assume a single adult engagement model. Second, it should place stronger emphasis on support, accompaniment and ongoing management rather than treating adult recruitment as the central challenge in isolation. Third, it should incorporate recognition, competency validation and structured volunteer pathways as part of the value proposition of service. Fourth, it should treat flexibility, inclusion and wellbeing as integral design principles rather than optional adjustments.

The evidence also suggests that policy should help close the gap between formal alignment and operational reality. It is not enough for NSOs to affirm the importance of adults in principle if they do not yet have flexible schemes, role-specific training pathways, systems for satisfaction review or effective management structures. Policy should therefore drive implementation standards as well as conceptual direction.

Perhaps most importantly, Adults in Scouting policy should explicitly frame adult volunteering as a dynamic journey rather than as a series of role assignments. Adults enter, intensify, reduce, pause, re-enter and move across forms of service according to life-stage and circumstance. A policy that recognises this movement will be far more realistic and sustainable than one built around uninterrupted permanence alone.

10.9 Strategic Priorities for Recruitment, Support and Retention

Drawing the chapter together, five strategic priorities stand out for the Scout Movement. The first is to redesign adult volunteering as a diversified system rather than a single narrow pathway. The second is to reduce avoidable barriers through simpler processes, stronger onboarding and better role clarity. The third is to make flexibility credible through episodic, project-based, skills-based and hybrid opportunities alongside long-term leadership roles. The fourth is to strengthen recognition, support and well-being so that volunteers experience the Movement as a place where their contribution matters and their time is respected. The fifth is to expand inclusion by making adult pathways more accessible to under-represented groups and to those without prior scouting background.

These priorities do not represent a break with Scouting's core identity. On the contrary, they represent the work required to preserve that identity under contemporary conditions. The Scout Movement's enduring strengths—purpose, belonging, leadership development and social contribution—remain powerful. The challenge is to ensure that its adult volunteering structures are worthy of those strengths.

Final Conclusions

This report has shown that the contemporary volunteering landscape is not defined by the disappearance of civic commitment, but by a transformation in the conditions under which people are willing and able to serve. The desire to contribute, to support others and to act with purpose remains strong. Yet that desire now operates within a more pressured, unequal and fluid social reality, in which time is scarce, work and care compete intensely, mobility is greater, expectations are changing, and organisations can no longer presume that the volunteer of today will accept the same modes of commitment that were once taken for granted.

The evidence reviewed across the two documentary inputs converges on a simple but consequential truth: volunteering remains viable where it is meaningful, visible, supported, flexible and respected. It weakens where it is burdensome, opaque, poorly managed or disconnected from lived reality.

For the Scout Movement, the implications are especially sharp because adult volunteering is not ancillary to the mission: it is one of its essential carriers. Where adult pathways are too rigid, too bureaucratic or too narrow, the educational promise of Scouting is weakened. Where adult participation is diversified, better supported and more intelligently aligned with contemporary life, the Movement gains not only more volunteers, but a stronger foundation for continuity, inclusion, quality and growth.

If the Scout Movement wishes to strengthen Adults in Scouting in a durable way, it will need to treat volunteering as an ecosystem. Some adults will lead weekly sections. Others will mentor, train, advise, support projects, contribute specialist skills, accompany short-term initiatives, assist digitally or return after periods of absence. A strong movement is not one that asks all adults to volunteer in the same way. It is one that can gather many forms of service into one coherent mission. Where institutions learn to reduce friction, widen access, care for volunteers, honour contribution and design more realistic pathways of service, volunteering can remain not only possible but strong.

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