

VIVA – The volunteer investment and value audit A self-help guide

Performance measurement and accountability have become increasingly important in the sphere of voluntary action. Assessing the total impact of volunteering should take account of different stakeholders: the volunteer, the volunteer-involving organisation, the recipients/beneficiaries, the local community and the wider society; and different types of 'capital': economic, physical, social, human and cultural. A total volunteer audit can be a complex task requiring a multi-method approach.

This guide focuses on the economic approach, which has been the most widely developed and applied. It provides a guide for groups and organisations on how to use VIVA - the Volunteer Investment and Value Audit. VIVA is a measurement tool that assesses the 'outputs' of volunteer programmes (the value of volunteers' time) in relation to the 'inputs' (the resources used to support the volunteers). It therefore provides informative and readily grasped indicators of the scale and significance of voluntary work and the payback on an organisation's investment in volunteering.

VIVA has been well tried and tested by many large and small charities and voluntary groups since its creation in 1996. It has been used in public sector and employer-supported volunteering, and is approved by the National Centre for Volunteering and the British government. Organisations have found the process of carrying out a VIVA beneficial in:

- Developing more effective management information on volunteers
- Better strategic planning and development of volunteer programmes
- cost-effectiveness and boosting investment in volunteers
- Increased recognition, recruitment and retention of volunteers
- Attracting external funding and improving accountability
- Public relations and promotion of the organisation

A word of caution, though. The economic approach focuses purely on monetary value and may be damaging if it reinforces the notion that volunteering is all about saving money. It is therefore vital that indicators of cost-effectiveness are always considered within a full appreciation of why your organisation has volunteers and the many values and benefits which volunteering produces.

Total volunteer investment

VIVA adds up all costs associated with having volunteers. Ask yourself ‘would we have to spend this if we didn’t have volunteers?’ If the answer is ‘no’, then include it as a volunteering cost. Collect expenditures for a period of one year, taking figures from your volunteer budget or the previous year’s accounts. Estimate the cost if the actual figure is not available.

Category of expenditure	Cost details	Amount (£)
1. Volunteer services manager/co-ordinator	Annual salary	
2. Volunteer manager’s assistant/secretary	Annual salary	
3. Other paid staff	% of annual salary corresponding to % of time spent on managing or supporting volunteers	
4. Advertising and recruitment	Cost of printing leaflets, posters etc., and of producing and placing advertisements	
5. Induction and training	Costs of materials, lunches, childcare, staff time (unless already included, above) and fees paid for external training	
6. Volunteers’ expenses	Travel and out of pocket expenses reimbursed to volunteers	
7. Administration, support and recognition	Volunteer newsletters, meetings, socials, parties, awards, certificates, office expenses and other non-salary costs	
8. Supplies and equipment	Clothing, badges, materials and equipment provided free to volunteers for their volunteering	
9. Food and accommodation	Costs of drinks, food and accommodation provided free while volunteering	
10. Volunteer insurance	Cost of the volunteer insurance policy or a percentage of the organisation’s overall insurance policy, to cover volunteers	
11. Volunteer-related building costs or expenses	Rent and utility costs where buildings are maintained solely for volunteers	
Total annual expenditure		

Total volunteer value

VIVA analyses what volunteers do and for how much time, matches it to equivalent paid work and applies the market wage. This produces a notional volunteer wage bill – ‘what we would have to pay people to do the work of our volunteers’. For wage rates, obtain national rates from the annual New Earnings Survey (available from the Office of National Statistics), local rates from employers and jobcentres, or you can use pay scales and rates internal to your organisation.

Include regular volunteers who volunteer week on week, and non-regular volunteers such as management committee members/ trustees, occasional/seasonal and fundraising volunteers. It may be easier to estimate hours for non-regular volunteers over a whole year rather than per week. For fundraising volunteers, use the national minimum wage. Do not add in the amount of funds raised by these volunteers, but be sure to mention this extra income as ‘value added’. Make estimates if exact figures are not available.

Volunteer or volunteer job title	Equivalent paid job	Hourly wage rate for job	Total weekly hours in this role	x 48 or no of weeks per year worked by volunteers	x hourly wage rate = value of this role in a year
1. example: Volunteer driver	Taxi/cab driver	£6.67	30	1440	£9604.80
2.					
3.					
4.					
5.					
6.					
7. etc					
Totals			Total hours per week	Total hours per year	Total annual value

Adding employment overheads

After calculating the total volunteer value, you can add an additional 20 per cent to cover the costs of 'employment overheads'. This is because, in addition to paying the actual wage, an employer also covers employee costs such as national insurance, holiday pay and other benefits. You can omit this additional percentage or show both Ratios, with and without the additional 20 per cent.

The VIVA ratio

Divide the total volunteer value by the total volunteer investment to produce the VIVA Ratio. For example, a total value of £50,000 and expenditure of £10,000 yields a Ratio of 5. The Ratio has a simple meaning: 'for every £1 we spend on volunteers, we get back £5 in the value of the work they do', a five-fold return on the organisation's investment in volunteering.

Other VIVA figures

VIVA also produces the following results:

- the total number of volunteer hours given to the organisation in a year: this is usually an impressive figure!
- the full-time equivalent (FTE) of the total volunteer hours: divide total annual hours by 48 (number of weeks worked per year) and again by 40 (number of hours per week) to indicate the additional full-time staff that the organisation would need to do the work that volunteers currently contribute.
- a full activity profile of the volunteer contribution to the organisation: the range of volunteer roles and the amount of time given in each can indicate where most volunteer work is concentrated and perhaps identify areas for expansion.
- per capita hours, value and expenditure for an average volunteer: divide the totals for each by the number of volunteers. This shows how much, on average, a volunteer contributes in a year, how much her or his work is worth and how much is spent on each volunteer by the organisation.
- a detailed budget breakdown: calculate a percentage distribution of all items of total expenditure. This gives a useful indication of where expenditure is concentrated and may suggest areas where spending can be increased. It provides a model for budgeting future volunteer programmes and a cost guide when bidding for funding or negotiating service contracts.

More about measuring value

This guide is written by Katharine Gaskin, who created and developed VIVA. To order *Valuing Volunteers in Europe: a comparative study of VIVA* Research Bulletin, or for an update on ways of measuring the value and impact of volunteering, and the development of a total volunteer audit toolkit, contact the Institute for Volunteering Research. For more information about the Institute or the National Centre for Volunteering call 020 7520 8900, e-mail instvolres@aol.com or visit www.ivr.org.uk