



**Volunteering Enabling
Plan 2025-2027
Summary**



INTRODUCTION

Our Strategy, Connecting Communities for Change, sets out our purpose to engage more people – in more ways – with the natural world, in order to inspire them to address climate change, biodiversity loss and wellbeing issues with the power of natural green spaces.

These ambitious plans are only achievable with the support, and growth, of our loyal community of changemakers. Our volunteers are an invaluable part of this Earth Trust community, engaged in a wide range of activities that underpin our work.

In order to achieve our vision, we want to build and connect a wider volunteer community, diversifying our volunteer network and supporting more people to join us, so that together we can champion accessible natural green spaces where nature and people thrive in balance.

This plan aims to bring clarity to our aspirations to grow our volunteer community to support our strategy and sets out how we will achieve it.

We analysed the volunteering activities in place across Earth Trust in 2024, and using feedback from our volunteers, together with external reference points, we have sought to understand the strengths of our existing programme and seek out opportunities to evolve, improve and grow volunteering over the next three years.

Our Volunteering Enabling Plan:

- Sets the context of where we are today
- Identifies strategic and operational priorities from now until 2027
- Provides a roadmap for the development of the volunteer programme

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Strategic overview

Earth Trust's past, present and future is due to the hard work, love, determination and care that volunteers have for the green spaces we manage.

In addition to a passion for natural green spaces, our volunteers are motivated to join us for a myriad of reasons. To learn new skills or gain work experience, for the social benefits of making new friends and connecting with others, to improve their physical health or mental wellbeing. Or simply to give something back or be out in nature.

Volunteers bring a range of motivations, skills and experiences to Earth Trust. They have a direct impact on our ability to progress - the time, talent and energy that help us to do more every day – and grow our ambition for what is possible.

Where are we today

We offer 15 different volunteering roles providing outdoor, indoor and public facing opportunities to support our work. Each requires varying levels of skill, experience and training and they range from being ad hoc and flexible to regular commitments and remote options.

Volunteer Role	Frequency	Number of Active Volunteers (Dec-24)
Land Management	Weekly/adhoc	152
Education	Weekly/adhoc	25
Events	Ad hoc	82
Office	Weekly	9
Ambassador	Seasonal	6
Centre Support	Weekly	16
Total Active Volunteers ¹		290
Total Registered Volunteers		320

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Commented [NF2R1]: Updated

In the 18 months to December 2024, the number of active volunteers we have has grown from 185 to 290 – a 50% increase. Volunteers contribute over 19,000 hours of time.

Year	No. of active Volunteers
2021	139
2022	205
2023	243
2024	290

¹. An active volunteer is someone who has volunteered in the last 12 months. About 70 volunteers join us on a regular weekly basis and around 7% do more than one role.

Our volunteers, in the main, are finishing, or have finished, working. 75% come from within a 10 miles radius. Gender split is almost even with 53% male, 47% female.

Volunteering is generally within the working week (Monday-Friday, 9-5) but over the last 18 months we have introduced a structured programme for young volunteers (13-18 years old) and a monthly Saturday group in Wallingford.

Our volunteer opportunities are communicated via a weekly newsletter which goes out to all 320 registered volunteers.

Setting the context

Internal perspective

We looked at the areas where we felt we had strengths in our current approach, and where challenges and opportunities might be, resulting in the following 'SWOT' analysis:

Strengths <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Groups of long-term volunteers• Regular, consistent communication• High levels of participation in recognition events• Work of volunteers is deeply appreciated	Weaknesses <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Inconsistency of staff lead approach• Sessions dependent on access to a car and framed around office hours
Opportunities <ul style="list-style-type: none">• We cannot meet existing demand for volunteering (young people doing work experience, one-off use of employee volunteer days etc)• Organisational growth	Threats <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ensuring volunteer and organisational needs align• Potential for an inconsistent volunteer experience as growth in volunteer numbers isn't matched with staff support

External perspective

There is a great deal of ongoing and anticipated change in our external environment. The major ones likely to affect us are:

- Social – the growth of local communities due to building developments. Whilst this will make our spaces busier, it brings people into the area who are more likely to be working full-time (and with families) who have limited historical connection to our spaces or Earth Trust.
- Social – as the state retirement age increases and cost of living rises, people may a) be less likely to retire earlier, or b) have less time to volunteer.
- Environmental – extreme weather conditions materially affect our land management operation (what can be done and when during the season) but also affects when people are willing to volunteer for outdoor activities – staying away in extreme heat, cold or rain.

"Competitor" analysis

Looking at similar organisations working in our sector helps us understand what others are doing and how we may learn from them.

The themes of what others are doing well include:

- A registration process for volunteers which includes being able to directly apply for roles
- A [trainee scheme](#) to help younger people build up skills through volunteering to help enter the conservation sector
- A learning and development programme which builds skills, knowledge and networks
- High profile recognition schemes to say thank you and recognise service

Reflecting on what others are doing, we think they could learn from us on things such as:

- Information about the roles available and focus on risk assessment & health & safety
- The culture within Earth Trust and its approach to volunteers as members of a close supporter community
- The frequency in which we talk about or showcase volunteering through our digital channels and communication work

Our rolling strategic focus

We have identified two lead priorities for the next three years that will enable us to provide an improved volunteer experience and achieve our organisational objectives:

1. Evolving our model through creating new ways into volunteering (entry routes)
2. A purposeful and fun volunteer experience (a quality experience))

Commented [DL3]: @Nicola Frost I have updated the wording following our discussion. Do these work?

Commented [DL4R3]: @Nicola Frost

Creating new routes into volunteering

Year	Enabling Activity
2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A second monthly weekend land management group• A 'gentler' option for land management volunteer tasks• Improved offer for corporate volunteering / employee volunteer days
2026	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Weekend volunteering at the Centre – maintenance or gardening• New digital materials for onboarding• Complete review of application -> onboarding Implement Action Plan• Project pipeline for indoor-based volunteers
2027	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Scaled-up young person training programme (ie Young Ranger)

A purposeful and fun experience

Year	Enabling Activity
2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Annual session leader training• Easier routes to request training for volunteers• Ongoing training programme for Staff Leads
2026	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• External accreditation for our volunteer programme• Reviewed Volunteer Experience Team setup / impact

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Centralised record of skills, training requests and training undertaken • New digital access to risk assessments, policies, records
2027	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relationships with other voluntary organisations to signpost where we can't meet need • Established the role, if any, of site-specific 'friends of' groups • Stay / Exit Interviews alongside annual survey

Measures of success

1. Session leaders in all parts of the organisation
2. Incrementally growing and retaining young people's involvement
3. Volunteering roles available out of typical working hours
4. 40%+ volunteer experience (through annual survey)

Fundraising opportunities

This Volunteer Plan is not dependent on a significant resource increase however, increased funding could provide us with a platform to improve the reach or quality of our volunteering.

The plan would benefit from funding through:

- Contributing to staff costs
- Designing the training programme for volunteer managers and/or leaders
- Purchasing equipment to support digitisation of processes
- Paying for external training for volunteers
- Contributing to the costs of networking or thank you sessions

Contact

If you would like to discuss the plan or receive a copy of the full version, or if you feel you could help us achieve our aspirations or contribute to the development of our volunteer programme, we would love to hear from you. Please get in touch with:

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