Volunteering Data Standards Working Group 1
14 November 2025

Documents:

- Slide Deck: 🟧 Volunteering SWG 1 - 14/11
- Whiteboard: Miroboard (This board is now open for comments only)
- Terms of Reference: 📄 #SHARED Developing an Open Data Infrastructure for Volunteering and S…

Agenda:

1. Welcome
2. Introducing the project
   - The ODI & volunteering
   - Our hypothesis and focus
   - What is a Standards Working Group?
3. Initial data model
4. Next Steps

Attendee profile

The working group was attended by 34 people, including 5 members of the ODI project team (Andrew, Mathieu, Jo, Julie and Camilla).

25 attendees contributed to the whiteboard:
- 5 indicated holding executive roles
- 7 indicated holding volunteering management roles at VIOs
- 7 indicated holding data roles
- 5 indicated themselves as systems vendors

We had representation from volunteers in the meeting: 11 attendees indicated that they held some form of volunteer role.

Attendees were seeking to
- Find out more about the project and understand how they could support the project in their context
- Contribute to the development of data standards
- Help the the project add value, for example by supporting grass roots charities, adding value in a particular sector or geography and by promoting data sharing

Introducing the project

Andrew Newman (Principal Data Specialist at the ODI) introduced the ODI, provided an overview of the project and its objectives. The information presented by can be found in the meeting slides key points

included:

Definitions of..
- Data infrastructure: The data. The policies and standards that define and control the data.The technical infrastructure that provides access to the data. The organisations and people that contribute to, and steward, these things.
- Open standards for data: Open standards are available for anyone to access, use and share, they are developed using open processes. Open standards for data help us publish, access, share and use better quality data.
- APIs: An API is a digital messenger that allows one piece of software to talk to another piece of software securely and efficiently.
- Standards Working Group: A community of subject matter experts including: Thematic experts, data experts and software providers collaborating to agree standards.

The project and it's purpose:
- Hypothesis we are aiming to prove: Can we transform the volunteer experience by improving data infrastructure?
- To co-design, test, and prove the value of a modern, open data infrastructure for volunteering in England.
- Our goal is to deliver a modern, open, and sustainable volunteering data infrastructure: one that makes opportunities more discoverable, ensures equitable access for small and grassroots organisations, and establishes the governance and stewardship models needed to secure trust and adoption.

An overview of discovery activities with a focus on the use cases identified:
- a. Improving recruitment
- b. Incentivising retention
- c. Increasing awareness and marketing
- d. Making volunteer skill checks, background checks, and training more efficient
- e. Mobilising volunteers in national emergencies (and events)
- f. Building evidence and reports for use in management decisions
- g. Reporting impact (and potential impact) to donors (and potential donors)
- h. Ensuring digital platforms speak the same language, allowing information to move between systems
- **Use case H and data about opportunities to volunteer will form the focus for the alpha stage of the project**

The scope of the alpha phase (current phase):
- Purpose: To test the feasibility of introducing a common open data standard for volunteering opportunities.
- Objectives
    - Design a draft open data standard to support interoperability between volunteering platforms, leveraging existing solutions where relevant to enhance sustainability.
    - Develop a minimum viable technical infrastructure to enable data collection, sharing and use.
    - Test the data standard and infrastructure through collaborative experimentation and feedback.

- Begin to establish the early governance model, stewardship options and stakeholder alignment.

This presentation was followed by a discussion session key discussion point are documented below:

Q: Is the group working towards short term (task-based) goals or longer-term outcomes?
A: Initially the project is working towards short term goals, particularly the provision of test data and infrastructure for the end of Alpha hackathon. However we are doing this with a view to building a strong foundation for future projects. Initially we will use this group as a review team and source of critique and insight to inform our delivery, but expect this role to evolve as the project continues.

Q: What happens to the group if no further funding is available after December 2025?
A: Funding is guaranteed until 31 December 2025, and a provision for funding is in place until March 2026, dependent on the outcome of the Alpha, we are already considering funding beyond March 2026.

Q: Are the standards focused only in the UK context?
A: Yes initially it will be UK-focused, however through our discovery we have spoken to some organisations in Europe and North America who are interested in the work and its application in their territories.

Q: What is the specific sector the group will be focusing on?
A: The sector definition has been deliberately kept open at this stage, we are aiming for general purpose standards that can provide a common data model. The project may be more focused on specific sectors and particular cases after Christmas.

Q: What has been done towards diversity, inclusion and physical accessibility?
A: This first model will have gaps, and we acknowledge this is an area where we will need to focus. Some parallel work is being undertaken in OpenActive which may help us here. If group members have suggestions or insights on the types of data required please feed in as the model develops. We would be happy to have a deep-dive or 1:1 discussion on this topic if there is demand.

Q: Do you have any technology assumptions for the Alpha and Beta phases (this question was not discussed in the meeting)
A: We want to build a data infrastructure and standards that are technology agnostic. We are not aiming to build a new digital solution but to provide data infrastructure that can enhance existing solutions and provide a platform for innovation. We are mindful that there is a low level of data and digital capacity and maturity in parts of the volunteering system and aim to ensure all organisations can participate and benefit from our work.

Action: Working group members who have additional questions about the project can raise these with ODI by emailing andrew.newman@theodi.org or research@theodi.org.

Initial data model workshop

The initial data model that has been developed was presented by the ODI team using a Miro whiteboard. The group worked in 3 breakout rooms to discuss the data models specifically to identify gaps in the models.

The following summary captures the key points raised in these discussions, this is based on an analysis of the whiteboard after the workshop.

Activity Modeling Requirements
- The activity model must encompass multiple volunteering formats including formal/informal roles, one-off events, recurring opportunities, remote tasks, and workshops. Essential attributes include:
    - Role description and specific tasks
    - Support provided and volunteer benefits
    - Required experience and skills
    - Training requirements
    - Restrictions (age limits, DBS checks)
    - Accessibility adjustments (wheelchair access, childcare)
    - Capacity management (max spots, waitlist)
    - Application flow (open, manual approval, referral)Critical question raised: Is "activity" the correct terminology, and should concepts be differentiated by category (e.g., area vs. type)?

Location Complexity
- Location modeling presents significant challenges beyond simple physical addresses:
    - Remote/home-based opportunities
    - Virtual locations
    - Wide geographic spread (e.g., bag packing across multiple cities)
    - Online roles linked to physical buildings (trustees)
    - Neighborhood/community areas
    - Non-geographically based activities (telephone befriending, social media)Organisations need flexibility to avoid creating duplicate opportunities for multi-location activities.

People and Organisations
- The model must accommodate diverse stakeholder types: volunteers, employees, donors, beneficiaries, and non-engaged contacts. Key data elements include:
    - Contact information and identifiers
    - Volunteering history
    - Interests and preferences
    - Permissions
    - Communication historyOrganisation attributes should capture: size, volunteer reliance, operating area (national/county), type, and target beneficiary groups.

Time and Duration Considerations
- Time modeling requires flexibility for:
    - One-off vs. regular commitments
    - Session-based vs. role-based timeframes
    - Repeating sessions
    - Unclear time constraints
    - Last-minute changes or calls to action
    - Volunteer availability matchingNote: Structured time data is optional but valuable for matching volunteers to opportunities.

Systems Integration Considerations
- Cross-system visibility (social media, multiple platforms)
- API definitions for opportunity posting
- Information currency and relevance management
- Public/non-profit infrastructure positioning
- Metadata through custom tags
- Carbon cost tracking
- Impact measurement

Action: Working group members can continue to feed into the Miro board using the Comment function in Miro or by contacting the ODI team andrew.newman@theodi.org or research@theodi.org.

Action: The ODI team will review and document the feedback received and use this to inform future model development.

Next Steps

This section outlines the next steps in the project:

Current Sprint (2) - 10/11/2025 to 21/11/2025 we are working on:

- Development of data sharing mechanisms, including:
  - A simple API that can respond to predetermined queries
  - Transform data from format to format
- Use feedback from today's session to improve the data model

Sprint 3 - 24/11/2025 to 5/12/2025 we will be working on:

- Second meeting of the Standards Working Group to discuss data sharing mechanisms
- Preparation of documentation & resources for hackathon
- Hackathon

Sprint 4 - 8/12/25 to 19/12/2025 we will be working on:

- Third meeting of Standards Working Group to review outcomes from hackathon
- Updates to the data model and data sharing mechanisms based on learning from the hackathon

Hackathon
- 3rd - 4th December
- Mary Ward House, Tavistock Place, London WC1H 9SN
- Participants will work on practical challenges, test data flows between systems, and discuss what's needed to make this approach work across the sector
- Technology skills are not essential!
- A free ticket to the event can be found here