GSS Voluntary Sector Placement Scheme

Review of progress, 2014 and 2015

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GSS Voluntary Sector Placement Scheme

- First launched in London autumn 2014, based on successful scheme run by Scottish Government.
- Links GSS volunteers with voluntary sector organisations. The volunteer provides up to 5 days analytical support.
- Partnership with National Council for Voluntary Organisations. NCVO helped develop the scheme documentation and promote scheme to voluntary sector.
- Developed link with Pro Bono OR: PBOR has wide network of volunteers across country, often able to help out when organisations apply but GSS can’t support them.

Benefits of the scheme

- Each placement provides voluntary sector organisations with up to 5 days ‘free’ analytical support.
- Improved links between GSS and voluntary sector user community.
- GSS volunteers gain insight into user perspective.
- Opportunity for volunteer to develop / demonstrate particular skill sets, especially project management skills, stakeholder engagement.
- Transfer of skills to voluntary sector.

London Scheme

2014		2015
65	**Voluntary Sector applications** ➢ From largest charities e.g. Barnardos, Comic Relief.. ➢ ..to very small organisations	54
46	**GSS Volunteers** ➢ From 21 different Departments over the two years ➢ Ranging from EO (StO) to G7	32
25	**Known successful outcomes** ➢ Number of matches with positive feedback from organisation and / or volunteer ➢ 16 placements from 2014 fell through, 5 outcome unknown	tbc

All organisations who have applied have either been matched with a volunteer or offered assistance from PBOR

Franchise model

- National Statistician's Office co-ordinated the first London scheme in 2014 in partnership with NCVO. Following its success, groups of GSS volunteers have run 2015 London scheme and two others – in South West / Wales and 'the North' – with input from NCVO and other local umbrella bodies.
- Schemes outside London have found it harder to recruit both GSS volunteers and voluntary sector organisations, and the placement projects have often been poorly defined, making placements challenging.
- Regional schemes have continued on a rolling basis, finding volunteers to support voluntary sector as need or opportunity arises. However, the majority of regional placements stem from interest generated by launch of annual London scheme, so it would be beneficial to co-ordinate the schemes more closely.

Total contribution so far!

(Estimated volunteer hours)*

The GSS has supported the following organisations:

Leonard Cheshire Disability The Dash Charity SOVA Crimestoppers Trust CSV Healthwatch Islington Greenwich Action for Voluntary Service Eva Women's Aid Foundation 4 Peace Cardio Myopathy Association Clean Break Healthwatch Camden National Deaf Children's Society Voluntary Organisations Disability Group Guidedogs Barnarndos Bexley Snap The Foundation for Social Improvement Raleigh International Spark Inside Develop Enhancing Community Support Hertfordshire Community Foundation Sheffield Students Union Healthwatch Central West London Rennie Grove Theatre vs Oppression Chwarae Teg British Lung Foundation

* I wouldn't stake my statistician's reputation on the accuracy of this figure, based on information available about complete placements from 2014 London scheme and regional schemes. 2015 London scheme placements not yet complete, so not included in estimate.

Feedback – what they said

GSS…

A little bit of GSS time goes a long way to help small charities!

I designed a new report layout which automatically updated, saving about half a day's work each quarter

Spreadsheets are second nature to me and my colleagues but 3 days' work has really (hopefully) made a difference.

It's nice to meet new people and get out of the civil service and Whitehall bubble.

an insight into how charities perceive Government and our work

gaining confidence that my advice as a professional statistician is respected and valuable

it is a good feeling to be using your skills to help cash-strapped voluntary organisations who are really appreciative of your help

…Voluntary Sector

Without our volunteer's external view and significant experience it's unlikely that we would have got the traction that this piece of work needed.

will have a lasting impact

our volunteer was so flexible, approachable and thorough

gave us advice and examples on how to present our statistics and data more effectively.

I could not have done it without her!

You gave us clear written instructions on how to better use our data particularly for the purposes of funding applications - I have already used some of the tables you provided for this.

Enormous impact. The work has directly informed our strategy.

Lessons Learned (1)

Not all placements are completed successfully. Some placements fall through because the volunteer or voluntary sector organisation (or both) don't make contact; the volunteer or organisation contact move jobs; the placement project is stopped. There is a limit to what we can do to influence these factors. However, it is important to review progress and learn lessons from each scheme.

We have identified three key risks arising from the scheme:

1. Reputation risk for GSS, arising from any placements that aren't successful in eyes of the voluntary sector.
2. Potential for misuse of outputs – e.g. voluntary organisation promoting outputs as 'government endorsed'.
3. Risk of errors in the work completed by the volunteer.

We have already sought to address these risks through the application process and the guidance we provide ahead of placements. For example, the guidance provided to voluntary sector is very clear that outputs from the placement are not to be badged as a government product or government endorsed.

However, there is scope to strengthen this further for future schemes. For example, voluntary sector organisations could be required to sign a short agreement that clarifies the role of the volunteer and the status of any outputs produced.

Lessons Learned (2)

Other lessons learned from review of feedback include:

- Voluntary Sector organisations needed more guidance on the types of projects that were achievable in the time period. Guidance was improved for 2015.
- Placements need to be based around a clearly defined project for them to be successful. Where the brief is vague volunteers have struggled to make an impact. Guidance emphasizes importance of initial meeting between volunteer and organisation, to discuss and agree the objective of the placement.
- Volunteers need to be clear with the organisation about the time available for the project. Some volunteers have found the requirements grow as the project progresses, and they then feel obliged to contribute more of their own time.
- For 2015 scheme, all volunteers encouraged to get outputs checked by a work colleague as necessary; and advised to contact organising team if they feel they are struggling to complete placement on own.
- Considerable effort required to recruit volunteers. Word of mouth more effective than GSS website, email and other channels.
- SW / Wales regional scheme recruited volunteers from other analytical professions – this proved effective; few projects require detailed statistical expertise.
- Not as easy as it should be to work as a cross-dept team to deliver 2015 scheme – needing to share documents and using shared email address. Emailing volunteers and organisations is resource intensive.
- Voluntary Sector would appreciate opportunity of ‘follow-up’ visit from volunteer, after 6 months.

Next steps

- GSS Professional Support continue to find volunteers to lead both the London scheme and regional schemes.
- Scope to link up with other analytical (or wider) government professions in 2016, offer more skill sets, more volunteers. Explore possibility of pairing volunteers, to tackle bigger projects and to address risk of errors (two pairs of eyes).
- And / or link with Royal Statistical Society's initiative, Statisticians for Society.
- NCVO continue to partner GSS in the London scheme and help promote potential regional schemes through its network.
- Further improve guidance provided to volunteer and organisation, perhaps to include a simple, formal agreement that sets out roles, responsibilities (including for health and safety) and status of any outputs produced during the placement.

Case Study

Madeleine May, a statistical officer at the Department for Culture Media and Sport, volunteered for a five day placement with **The Foundation for Social Improvement**, an organisation that gives small charities the strategic support they need to keep running.

Madeleine May, DCMS

I was asked to analyse the data from an online survey of the charity's members assessing their skills gaps and difficulties filling vacancies. I found the experience very helpful in developing my project management skills. Working alongside people without a background in analysis meant that I was able to use dissemination skills in order to explain the work I had done in a way that they could understand. The placement allowed me to build on skills that I have learnt in my current role but with a level of independence that I do not usually experience.

The FSI

Having Madeleine join us was a huge asset to our organisation. As a small charity we do not have the expertise in house to deliver the project without already adding to stretched workloads. We were extremely impressed with the quality of the work produced by Madeleine which will mean the delivery of the most comprehensive piece of research we have launched so far. In addition to this Madeleine has put in place the structure to allow us to replicate the level of assessment for future years.