

How Reach works

People often assume that Reach's platform IS the service. However, there is a much more to our impact than the platform alone: it is a trusted, actively managed service that brings together technology, people, expertise, data, partnerships, brand and a large community of users.

The organisations and volunteers who use the service are its primary agents: they drive the activity rather than passively receive support. The service is co-produced by them, with Reach acting as an enabler of this activity.

The service's impact depends on the active engagement of a large and diverse range of charities and groups. This involves organisations investing time and thought in scoping meaningful roles, writing compelling copy, proactively searching for candidates and/or responding promptly to applicants. The service also depends on a large community of people with varied, relevant experience who are ready and willing to volunteer their skills. Sustaining that community requires a strong and consistent flow of new volunteers.

To run the service effectively in a fast-changing world, Reach continually develops the platform, guidance and support to encourage the behaviours most likely to produce a valuable match for both organisation and volunteer. This includes creating feedback loops, investing in user research and taking a user-centred, test-and-learn approach so the service responds to digital and societal change.

The sections below describe how Reach has made the service work, including the role of our relationships, brand and access to particular communities. Another organisation may have different strengths, relationships and routes into other communities, and could therefore run the service differently. It would still need to understand how the elements below work together and decide how each function would be sustained or replaced. Removing one without a credible alternative could destabilise the service. Treating it as a small ecosystem, rather than a standalone platform, will give any new model the best chance of success.

1. A clear purpose and specialist focus

Reach is designed specifically to recruit trustees and skilled volunteers into roles where charities and community groups need particular expertise.

This purpose is embedded throughout the service:

- volunteers are expected to bring at least three years' professional experience;
- opportunities are usually one-off rather than bulk or repeat roles, and are linked to an organisation's identified needs;
- the platform's profiles, search functions and categories are designed around skills;
- the service reflects specialist knowledge of trustee and skilled-volunteer recruitment.

This focus attracts volunteers with relevant skills and gives organisations confidence that people genuinely want to volunteer their expertise. Many organisations are pleasantly surprised to discover this, and evidence such as volunteer profiles builds their confidence in the model.

Without this focus, 'hands-on' and bulk roles could dominate the service and skills-based roles could become harder to find. Organisations might receive many more unsuitable applications, increasing administration and the emotional labour of rejecting people. The quality of interactions could decline, undermining engagement.

Resource implications:

Preserving this focus requires a service team to maintain clear boundaries around what constitutes skills-based volunteering (see section 3).

2. A purpose-built, two-sided platform

The platform enables:

- organisations to create profiles and post specific opportunities;
- volunteers to create profiles describing their skills and interests;
- volunteers to search and apply for opportunities;
- organisations to search for and approach suitable volunteers;
- both parties to assess whether an opportunity or relationship is relevant;
- two-way, on-platform messaging;
- email alerts and other prompts; and
- tracking of applications and placements.

The two-sided model matters. Organisations are not limited to waiting for applications; they can actively identify potential volunteers. Volunteers can see both the breadth of available opportunities and the range of organisations seeking help.

The visibility of roles, organisations and volunteer profiles also creates transparency. Seeing that others are offering and receiving help builds confidence in the service and helps people understand how they might participate.

The platform includes interventions intended to help relationships progress—for example, alerts and prompts to respond, which reduce “ghosting”. These apparently small features contribute to the quality of the user experience and the likelihood of a successful match.

Without these features, volunteers and organisations would find it harder to connect and assess whether they are a good fit, making the service less effective.

Resource implications

This is a complex platform to manage: changes to one feature can affect another that appears unrelated. It requires an experienced product manager and an engineer or digital agency to maintain and develop it.

3. An active service and quality-assurance team

The technology is supported by a service team that:

- vets organisations, roles and volunteer profiles;
- checks that users and opportunities meet Reach's criteria;
- helps organisations present clear and credible roles;
- responds to enquiries, assists users who encounter difficulties, and provides advice on attracting more volunteers;
- monitors behaviour and manages concerns or complaints about Reach's service or other users;
- provides human intervention where the digital process is not enough; and
- feeds recurring issues and insights into service improvement.

This produces better information, higher-quality roles and more relevant applications. It builds trust on both sides and makes recruitment more manageable for time-pressed organisations.

Operating this function requires more than general customer service. It depends on policies, training, specialist judgement, escalation arrangements and knowledge of trustee and skilled-volunteer recruitment. Any transfer would therefore need to include appropriate staff knowledge, processes and training.

Without this function, organisations could face many unsuitable applications, placing a significant burden on already stretched resources. For example, the team filters out many overseas applicants who mistakenly believe that volunteering will enable them to migrate to the UK. With more than 30,000 users, removing service-team support would create substantial operational and reputational risks.

Resource implications

The service team currently comprises 3.5 FTE staff, including the Head of Service, plus three volunteers. We have been experimenting with AI agents to streamline the work and believe there is scope to reduce staff effort, but realising this potential will require further investment.

4. Scale and network effects

Reach has approximately 30,000 volunteers in its pool, around 16,000 new volunteer registrations each year, and thousands of participating charities and groups.

Scale creates several benefits:

- organisations have a greater chance of finding the skills they need;
- volunteers can choose from a broad range of roles and causes;
- a diversity of users creates opportunities for cross-fertilisation – for example introducing a wider audience to trustee roles;
- the breadth of opportunities and organisations attracts more volunteers;

- the breadth of expertise attracts more organisations; and
- each side of the marketplace makes the other more valuable.

This creates a network effect: more organisations and opportunities attract more volunteers, while more volunteers and skills attract more organisations.

Scale must be continually renewed. A steady flow of new volunteers is needed because people leave the available pool, take up roles or become inactive. If recruitment slows, the pool becomes depleted, fewer roles are filled and the service becomes less attractive to organisations—potentially creating a downward cycle.

A service restricted to a narrower group of organisations or opportunities could still be valuable, but would represent a materially different proposition and might struggle to sustain the same level of volunteer engagement.

Resource implications

Maintaining scale requires maintaining and developing new partnerships, effective digital marketing, and ongoing user engagement.

As the platform's user base grows, so do its hosting requirements, including storage and processing power.

5. Reach, visibility and discoverability

Reach benefits from strong visibility beyond its own platform. This includes:

- strategic distribution partnerships such as LinkedIn, Rest Less and Fifth Day;
- high search-engine rankings;
- visibility in AI-generated search and recommendations.

These routes bring volunteers and organisations into the service, including people who were not already aware of Reach or actively searching for a volunteering role.

This discoverability has accumulated over time. It cannot be assumed that search rankings, AI referrals or referral traffic would automatically follow the service to a new operator or brand.

Strategic partnerships generate the highest volume of new volunteers, with LinkedIn the most significant: last year it produced about 60% of new volunteer registrations. However, LinkedIn has decided to close its 'Volunteer Marketplace' so this partnership is now ending. This will significantly reduce the inflow of volunteers. There is scope for mitigating this – if Reach were continuing, we would invest in stronger engagement with the existing volunteer community, including encouraging word-of-mouth recruitment, alongside developing new partnerships. AI search / recommendations are also a fast growing source of volunteers for Reach so there is potential here too.

Resource implications

See section 4.

The loss of the LinkedIn partnership means that more effort will be needed to generate a steady stream of volunteers

6. User-centred design, continuous improvement and intellectual property

The service has been developed iteratively around the needs and behaviours of its users. Evidence comes from:

- demographic user data;
- analysis of progression through registration, application and placement journeys;
- user research and usability testing;
- customer-service enquiries;
- chatbot logs;
- platform and web analytics;
- feedback from charities and volunteers; and
- the experience of the service team.

This creates a rich understanding of where users encounter barriers, which interventions improve engagement and what contributes to successful recruitment.

The value lies not only in the historic data, but in the organisational commitment and capability to gather evidence, interpret it and continually improve the service.

Some of this is embedded in the platform and documented processes; some sits with staff and organisational relationships. A successor would need to consider how the data, knowledge and expertise could be transferred lawfully and effectively, including the implications for consent, privacy and user expectations.

Resource implications

This requires expertise in service design, usability, research, data analysis and skilled-volunteering recruitment. Our Head of Service and Product Manager carry out this work.

7. Brand, reputation and trust

Reach has a well-established brand built over many years. Organisations often find and use the service because of:

- word-of-mouth recommendations;
- previous experience of recruiting through Reach;
- referrals from partners and other organisations;
- confidence in Reach's specialist expertise; and
- trust in the quality and legitimacy of the service.

The brand reduces the perceived risk of participating. It reassures volunteers that opportunities are credible and reassures organisations that potential applicants have relevant experience.

Some of this value could be lost if the service were no longer associated with Reach. Maintaining user confidence through a change of ownership or identity would therefore require careful planning and communication.

Questions for organisations interested in taking over the service

Area	Questions to explore
Purpose and strategic fit	Does the service fit their mission? Would they preserve its focus on trustees and skilled volunteers, and its openness to a wide range of charities and groups, including unincorporated groups?
User proposition	What would charities and volunteers continue to receive? Would both posting and active search remain available?
Technology	Could they operate, maintain and develop the two-sided platform and its integrations?
Service operation	Could they provide vetting, user support, complaints management and the interventions needed to produce successful matches?
Community and scale	How would they retain current users and maintain a continuing flow of new volunteers and organisations?
Brand and reputation	Would the Reach identity continue in some form? If not, how would existing trust and recognition be preserved?
Partnerships and acquisition	Could role-streaming and referral partnerships transfer? How would they maintain search, AI and other routes through which users find the service?
Data and insight	What data could lawfully transfer? Could they sustain the research, analysis and iterative development capability? Can they provide adequate cybersecurity?
People and knowledge	Which staff, policies, processes, expertise and relationships would be needed for continuity?
Financial sustainability	Can they support the cost to operate and develop the whole service, including the functions surrounding the technology?
Transition	How could continuity be maintained for users, roles, applications, messages and partner relationships during any change?

Contact details

If you are interesting in exploring your options further, please get in touch as soon as possible, and at the latest by 1 October 2026, to ensure we have enough time to discuss next steps.

Please email in the first instance on queries@reachvolunteering.org.uk.