

REQUEST FOR ASSISTANT DIRECTOR DECISION – ADD2561

Title: Supporting a London focussed Volunteering Website

Executive Summary:

The important role that volunteers play in supporting organisations, as well as the benefits of volunteering has long been recognised. The Team London Volunteering Website has been connecting organisations looking for volunteers, and members of the community seeking volunteering opportunities for over eight years. Created in 2013, the free to use website allows organisations to seek support by advertising hundreds of varied volunteering roles, from one-off events to ongoing commitments. As the work of the GLA has pivoted to be more focused on mission delivery over the last two years it has highlighted the role of the Mayor in enabling, convening and strategic development. As such, the GLA's role is better directed in enabling existing community assets to deliver products like the Team London Website as opposed to taking on the direct delivery. Subsequently a decision was made to decommission the Team London volunteering website.

This Decision seeks permission to grant funding of up to £50,000 to Simply Connect, an existing community asset, to enable them to grow their London focussed offer.

Decision:

That the Assistant Director of Team London and Community Sport approves:

1. Expenditure in the form of grant funding, granting £50,000 (£30,000 in 21/22 and £20,000 in 22/23) to Simply Connect to enable them to grow their London focussed offer.

AUTHORISING ASSISTANT DIRECTOR/HEAD OF UNIT

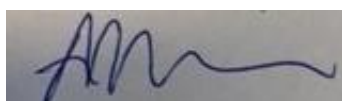
I have reviewed the request and am satisfied it is correct and consistent with the Mayor's plans and priorities.

It has my approval.

Name: Alice Wilcock

Position: Assistant Director, Team London and Community Sport

Signature:



Date:

21/2/22

PART I - NON-CONFIDENTIAL FACTS AND ADVICE

Decision required – supporting report

1. Introduction and background

- 1.1. The Team London Volunteering Website has been connecting organisations looking for volunteers, and members of the community seeking volunteering opportunities for over eight years. Created in 2013, the free to use website allows organisations to seek support by advertising hundreds of varied volunteering roles, from one-off events to ongoing commitments. Volunteers use these opportunities to make a difference to their local community, meet new people and gain new skills and experience. The benefit to both London organisations and volunteers is clear. In the past year alone the website has hosted opportunities for 223 organisations, with a total of 14,723 volunteer registering on the site in the same period.
- 1.2. Originally set up as a separate site, when London.gov was being rebuilt in 2019, it was decided that all microsites would come in-house. The Team London site was therefore developed and brought in house. The new site, although better than the old, has experienced considerable glitches and is still being worked on. The estimated spend for this year to continue to resolve issues/maintain it is over ten thousand pounds. Additional running costs include 0.5FTE of a Grade 6 member of Team London whose duties, amongst others, include working on the website to quality assure and approve roles. This ensures that the site only advertises roles that are meaningful and appropriate for volunteers in London and minimises reputational risk to the Mayor of London brand. The grade 6 Comms Assistant and grade 9 Comms manager also manage the physical running of the website, alongside members of the GLA Technology Group.
- 1.3. After much research and weighing up of priorities, benefits, costs, risks, alternatives, existing similar services, it was decided that Team London would not continue to invest in the website as an ongoing offering to London volunteers and organisations. As the work of the GLA has pivoted to be more focused on mission delivery over the last two years it has highlighted the role of the Mayor in enabling, convening and strategic development. As such, the GLA's role is better undertaken in enabling existing community assets to deliver offers such as a volunteering website as opposed to taking on the direct delivery.
- 1.4. It was strongly felt that there is a responsibility to the many TL website users and investment to date to ensure that they are still supported, and that there is a suitable transition period. For this reason Team London will enable an existing community asset, the priorities of which match those of the TL volunteering website, to further develop their offer. It is for this reason that this Decision seeks approval to grant funding of £50,000 (consisting of £30,000 in 21/22 and £20,000 in 22/23) to Simply Connect. The considerations made for this decision are as laid out in the following paragraphs.
- 1.5. User research on the Team London (TL) website completed in January 2021 showed:
 - there has been an increase in focus towards micro-volunteering and community volunteering over the last year. These roles are not well represented on the TL website.
 - there has also been an increase in desire for flexible / frictionless volunteering

- geographical area is a key requirement for volunteers searching for roles
- some elements of our filtering on the website (e.g. Skills to gain / useful skills) were confusing for users.
- the brand of the Mayor was viewed positively by volunteers and organisations. It added credibility to the roles and volunteers trusted the affiliation with the Mayor.
- the site is seen as diverse and inclusive. Organisations shared that the volunteers they had secured through the website were from diverse backgrounds.
- there are several improvements that could be made to the interface, usability and features of the website to improve the user experience. Some of this work has already taken place but substantial additional investment both on a one-off and ongoing basis would be required in order to complete this.
- although the TL website has good reach it doesn't have well established links in every borough

1.6. Other platforms delivering a similar service exist in London. These include:

- Volunteer centres, many of whom have their own locally focused platforms. London Plus (who support and connect local charities and community groups) lists 27 volunteer centres in London. These centres reported using various microsites, newsletters and volunteer services to promote roles. Of those who supplied feedback, some confirmed recommending using the TL website to advertise roles, and others recommend that volunteers use the site to find roles. Reasons for not using the TL website included wanting to focus their volunteers on supporting local (borough) organisations
- larger charities, many of whom are well known enough to recruit through their own website
- volunteer brokerage sites, some of whom are specialist, such as for students, corporate volunteering, and environmental volunteering

1.7. Having reviewed the user information and existing solutions it was apparent that more investment would be needed to ensure better functionality and user take-up. Other solutions already exist that supported those areas, although not perhaps not to the degree London requires. This was considered alongside the ongoing running costs for the TL site, including the continued focus of a team member to ensure that only high quality roles were available. The TL website had attracted a good range of high quality roles, which served the purpose of supporting the Mayor's Social integration work from 2016 – 2021. However with circa 2500 organisations registered on the site and approximately 400 opportunities online at any one time, supply has failed to meet the demand of the 50,000 volunteers that have registered through the site to date. This is because of the lack of human resource needed to effectively promote the site to the sector and manage vetting of opportunities. With a change in focus of the GLA's work to a more mission based approach it is an appropriate time to move away from frontline delivery of the site and work more in collaboration with the sector to deliver a website that can meet the needs of Londoners going forwards.

- 1.8. User research showed that there is value in having a London focused volunteering platform. If the Team London Website were to be decommissioned without a replacement there would be many regional voluntary sector organisations that would lose the opportunity to reach a London wide audience. Funding another organisation would build on the network that the TL website had started and provide a platform for the organisations that have been using the TL Website to date. It would enable more resource and capacity to work collaboratively with Volunteer centres and the VCS to increase the total number of opportunities being advertised to Londoners and ensure a broad level of promotion. An organisation that has more extensive links at a local level will lead to an increased offer in scope and scale of volunteering opportunities for Londoners.
- 1.9. Discussions were held with existing platforms about possible solutions. Team London spoke to four different brokerage sites that have a significant presence in London.
- one organisation has for some time been a key volunteer brokerage platform. Their current strategy is about looking towards what they can offer organisations as a source of ‘infrastructure tech’. They want to provide the platform so that others who have the audience can use the tech. While they have good national profile and reach, they have limited direct relationships with Volunteer centres and local authorities. Their platform does not offer any mechanism by which to vet the quality of volunteer roles that are advertised through it.
 - another are currently refreshing their organisational website strategy. They lead the coordination of some significant work, including a website which covers parts of London. Their new strategy is all about being place-based and encouraging communities to build / enable themselves. They are a service delivery organisation and run several projects across London. While their new website will be an exciting development in enabling the communities they work with to generate content, it will still very much be focused on their projects, without scope to become a more general London wide Platform.
 - Simply Connect, the proposed grantee, is currently supporting a locality-based system. Simply Connect already have a volunteer matching and recruitment platform used across 10 boroughs in Greater London by approximately 10,000 VCSE and over 40,000 volunteers. The organisation has recently been funded by the Health team at the GLA to develop a social prescribing platform for London and they are exploring how this approach could be extended to a volunteering platform for London.
 - the final organisation is a service that can work London wide but has mostly been working in the London borough where they are based. They have a model where they create pools of volunteers that organisations and local authorities can tap into. Volunteers are verified and organisations can then go on and find the volunteers they need. They have used this system for food bank volunteers, for volunteers to help with Afghan arrivals and for a large charity nationally. Whilst this model works well on a local and specific project basis, it does not lend itself to a more general London-wide approach.
- 1.10. After consideration of the relative merits of each organisation, Simply Connect would be most aligned with the priorities of Team London, and what the GLA would like to achieve in promoting and championing volunteering throughout London. Their existing networks with Volunteers Centres mean that they have good reach into boroughs that can be built on and mechanisms in place for vetting opportunities to ensure that only high quality opportunities are placed on the site. The work fits strategically with the direction the organisation were already exploring by

building on the development of their social prescribing site for London. There is scope in working with Simply Connect to create a clear London identity for a volunteering platform that is not run by the GLA.

2. Objectives and expected outcomes

- 2.1. Funding of £50,000 will allow Simply Connect to evolve their work to offer volunteering roles across Greater London. The organisation's work will: maintain local control wherever possible; be sustainable in the long term; have the buy-in of the VCSE across Greater London and Volunteer Centres. They will also explore routes to support more frictionless volunteering, particularly for events like Covid response and call outs for vaccination volunteers.
- 2.2. The key outcomes for this work will be:
 - increased supply of volunteering opportunities being advertised to Londoners. This will be achieved through close pre-existing links with volunteer centres to increase number of organisations registered with the site; migration of existing Team London roles to the Simply Connect site; and dedicated resource for promotion of the site to organisations to advertise opportunities.
 - improved ability for VCS organisations to advertise their roles in multiple places meaning greater reach of volunteer adverts to volunteers. The connection with volunteer centres means that groups can simultaneously advertise their roles on the new London-wide platform as well as the local sites hosted by Volunteer Centres connected to Simply Connect.
 - improved connections between volunteering and social prescribing in London. By having the volunteering platform hosted on the same medium as the social prescribing platform, VCSE organisations will be able to promote their opportunities to social prescribers as well as the general public. This will ensure a wider audience for these volunteer roles and will open up opportunities to Londoners who might not otherwise think of volunteering as an option.
- 2.3. Team London will work with Simply Connect to develop KPIs for this work and a monitoring framework where the project owner will regularly review: the number of organisations signed up to the site in London; the Number of volunteer roles being advertised; the number of volunteers signing up to the site; any trends in demographics or geography. By the end of year one, the team would hope to see:
 - similar numbers of volunteers registering with Simply Connect as have been achieved through the Team London website;
 - increased numbers of opportunities being advertised compared to the Team London website
 - improved geographical spread of organisations registering across London compared to the Team London website.

3. Equality comments

- 3.1. Under section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 (the Equality Act), as a public authority the Mayor must have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation, and any conduct that is prohibited by or under the Equality Act; and to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- 3.2. Volunteering and social action can provide many opportunities for Londoners to connect with others from diverse backgrounds. It can support belonging and community by bringing people together around a common cause. It can also help people gain new skills, knowledge and experience, including the ability to lead teams and create change. The Mayor wants all Londoners to access volunteering opportunities in their communities. A site with improved accessibility will add to this.

Creating a volunteering gateway for London through Simply Connect will allow the flexibility to develop a platform in a way that foregrounds informal as well as formal volunteering. Research has shown that more people take part in informal volunteering than formal volunteering. The NCVO report Time well Spent (2019) observes ‘some people that are under-represented in formal volunteering participate more in informal ways, for example through acts of neighbourliness’¹ Drawing on the connection between social prescribing and volunteering will also open up volunteering opportunities more to those Londoners experiencing health inequalities. The report outlines that those who participate in formal volunteering frequently are more likely to be from ‘older, well-educated and higher socio-economic groups,’ while those from lower socio-economic groups are more likely to say they have never volunteered or if they have then not in leadership roles like trustee positions.

4. Other considerations

Key risks and issues

	Risk	Mitigation / risk response
1	The new platform does not gain traction with organisations and volunteers	There is a pre-existing audience through the volunteer centres that already use Simply Connect and Team London and the GLA will signpost to the new platform, encourage users of the exiting Team London Website to sign up to it and promote it through networks across the GLA.
2	Simply Connect are unable to sustain the site	Resourcing of this site from the GLA will take place over two years to allow time for the site to become more embedded in the work of Simply connect. As a part of the funding process the team will ask for a sustainability plan for the site.

¹ https://www.ncvo.org.uk/images/documents/policy_and_research/volunteering/Volunteer-experience_Full-Report.pdf

3	Simply Connect do not utilise funding in the manner intended	Due diligence has been completed on the organisation. Funding will be released in tranches, and reporting will be a requirement.
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Links to Mayoral strategies and priorities

- 4.1. Team London's work on supporting civil society engages with communities and civil society groups across London to encourage active participation in community and civic life for all Londoners. This links to Mayoral priorities on social integration, social mobility and community engagement. Team London will be working closely with the Communities team and other relevant teams across the GLA to share findings emerging from this work.
- 4.2. Participation is a core enabler of the Building Strong Communities Mission. The aim of the mission is that 'by 2025 all Londoners will have access to a Community Hub ensuring they can volunteer, get support and build strong networks.' Investing in a volunteering gateway for London provides a strong infrastructure for organisations and community groups to advertise their opportunities and reach volunteers. Volunteering also has an impact on helping people to build connections in their communities and increasing sense of belonging, both intended outcomes of the BSC mission.

Impact assessments and consultations

- 4.3. In January 2021 Team London commissioned user experience research from Spotless on the Team London website. This research provided recommendations on how we could improve useability of the site. The research acknowledged that while the association with the Mayoral branding was positive and the site was seen as diverse and inclusive, there were several improvements that could be made to the interface, useability and features of the website to improve user experience. The team also reached out to volunteers centres through the London Plus Volunteer Centre Network to ascertain how widely volunteer centres used or signposted to the Team London website and engaged with ten volunteer centres directly.
- 4.4. Due consideration has been given to any potential conflict of interest, with none found to exist.

5. Financial comments

- 5.1 Approval is sort for expenditure in the form of grant funding, granting £50,000 (£30,000 in 21/22 and £20,000 in 22/23) to develop a legacy to the Team London Volunteering site.
- 5.2 The costs will be funded from the Team London Website & Awareness budget for 2021-22 and Volunteering and Resilience budget for 2022-23 under the 'Building Strong Communities' mission.
- 5.3 Any expenditure relating to Financial Year 2022-23 will follow the standard accounting procedures for the financial year end.

6. Planned delivery approach and next steps

Activity	Timeline
Sign Funding Agreement with Simply Connect	February 2022
Research and scoping a vision for the new website	March 2022
Delivery Start Date	April 2022
Prototype platform developed	July 2022
Testing of new platform	August – September 2022
Launch of new platform	October 2022
Ongoing delivery of new platform with promotion data gathering and evaluation to agreed milestones	November 2022 – November 2023
Delivery End Date and submission of final evaluation	December 2023
Project Closure:	December 2023

Public access to information

Information in this form (Part 1) is subject to the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FoIA) and will be made available on the GLA website within one working day of approval.

If immediate publication risks compromising the implementation of the decision (for example, to complete a procurement process), it can be deferred until a specific date. Deferral periods should be kept to the shortest length strictly necessary. **Note:** This form (Part 1) will either be published within one working day after it has been approved or on the defer date.

Part 1 - Deferral

Is the publication of Part 1 of this approval to be deferred? NO

Part 2 – Sensitive information

Only the facts or advice that would be exempt from disclosure under FoIA should be included in the separate Part 2 form, together with the legal rationale for non-publication.

Is there a part 2 form –NO

ORIGINATING OFFICER DECLARATION:

Drafting officer to
confirm the
following (✓)

Drafting officer:

Truly Johnston has drafted this report in accordance with GLA procedures and confirms the following:

✓

Corporate Investment Board

This decision was agreed by the Corporate Investment Board on 21 February 2022

✓

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR OF FINANCE AND GOVERNANCE:

I confirm that financial and legal implications have been appropriately considered in the preparation of this report.

Signature



Date

21/2/22