KENT VOLUNTEERS

A practical guide to applying for The King's Award for Voluntary Service

Would you like to receive the ultimate accolade for your organisation? Read on to find out how you can give your organisation the best chance of success in achieving The King's Award for Voluntary Service…

WHAT IS THE KING'S AWARD FOR VOLUNTARY SERVICE?

The King's Award for Voluntary Service (KAVS) is the highest national honour awarded to local volunteer-led groups in the UK - it's equivalent to an MBE. The award was created in 2002 and recognises outstanding community impact.

To be eligible, a group must:

- Be led by volunteers, not paid staff
- Involve at least three people
- Have operated for a minimum of three years
- Provide specific and direct benefits to their local community
- Have a majority of volunteers who have the right to live in the UK

Awards are made annually, with recipients officially announced each November.

UNDERSTANDING THE NOMINATION PROCESS

Who can nominate?

Nominations must be made by someone independent of your organisation - someone who knows your group well but who is not a current volunteer, staff member, trustee, committee member or anyone else closely connected.

Two additional independent letters of support are also required. These supporters should be people who:

- ✔ Benefit from your group's work, or
- ✔ Are aware of its community impact

Their letters must explain how they know your organisation and how it benefits the local community.

TIMELINE

The KAVS process operates on a consistent yearly cycle. Dates may change slightly, but tend to be…

September 1-December 1: Nomination window for the following year's awards

January-April: The Kent Lieutenancy conduct due diligence and visit eligible groups

April-June: National assessors review shortlisted groups

November 14: Awardees are announced in The Gazette and on gov.uk

November-March: The Lord-Lieutenant of Kent presents the awards

HOW ORGANISATIONS CAN PREPARE FOR A NOMINATION

Although your organisation cannot nominate itself, there are several proactive steps you can take to prepare, encourage, and support a strong nomination.

Strengthen your story and evidence

A strong nomination will demonstrate that your volunteer-led group:

- Has had a transformational impact in the community
- Operates with high standards
- Is volunteer-driven, with volunteers central to shaping and delivering your work
- Provides long-term benefit (at least three years) and shows clear evidence of growth, adaptation and sustained impact
- Is innovative and/or distinctive in its work

Gather and organise:

- Case studies and testimonials
- Data showing outcomes or community reach
- Examples of volunteer-led innovation or resilience
- Evidence of positive local partnerships

This helps ensure that any independent nominator has the information they need.

Identify potential independent nominators

Keep a list of individuals who understand your work and meet the independence criteria, such as:

- ✔ Community partners
- ✔ Beneficiaries
- ✔ Local professionals or stakeholders
- ✔ Supporters who are not trustees, committee members, volunteers or staff

Important: You cannot ask someone to nominate you directly in a way that pressures them, but you *can* raise awareness of the award and explain how it works, including who is eligible to nominate. For example, through:

- ✱ A statement in your newsletter
- ✱ A 'support us' page on your website
- ✱ Social media posts celebrating volunteers and mentioning the award scheme
- ✱ Case study packs sent to partners

This approach avoids undue influence but will increase your visibility.

Prepare supporters for the process

Since nominations must include two letters from independent supporters, you can:

- ✱ Explain publicly what a strong letter might typically include (such as the organisation's impact, personal experience, or community benefit)
- ✱ Provide open-access summaries of your work, outcomes and volunteer structure
- ✱ Ensure your website clearly states your mission, activities and volunteer reach

These resources will help your supporters write rich, accurate testimonials.

Remember…

Your role is to make your work easy to understand and celebrate. The nominator's role is to independently articulate why your group deserves recognition.

KEY STEPS FOR VOLUNTARY ORGANISATIONS

Step 1 - Review eligibility

Check your group meets the core criteria (that it is volunteer-led, has been operating for more than three years, and delivers community benefit).

Step 2 - Document your impact

Create a clear impact summary:

- ✔ What you do
- ✔ Who benefits
- ✔ Why your work matters
- ✔ The unique value of your volunteers

Step 3 - Build relationships with your wider community

This helps ensure a pool of independent nominators who can genuinely speak about the value of your organisation.

Step 4 - Prepare an information pack

Make sure you include:

- ✱ Annual reports
- ✱ Testimonials
- ✱ Volunteer numbers
- ✱ Examples of innovative or community leadership

Ideally you should ensure this information is publicly available so that nominators can access it independently.

Step 5 - Monitor the nomination window

Share information about the KAVS from September to December, when nominations are open.

Step 6 - Get ready for a possible visit

If nominated, the Kent Lieutenancy may visit to verify your work and meet your volunteers. This typically happens between January and April.

TIPS FOR A STRONG NOMINATION

✔ Highlight the volunteer-led nature of your work

Groups must show volunteers are truly at the heart of what they do and are driving the organisation.

✔ Focus on impact, not size

The award is about the *depth* of benefit, innovation and community reach, not how big your organisation is.

✔ Encourage authentic voices

Independent nominators and supporters should feel free to speak honestly and personally about the group.

✔ Be transparent and accessible

Make your achievements, governance and volunteer model easy to understand for people outside the organisation.

✔ Demonstrate high standards

Show excellence in safeguarding, volunteer support, governance and service delivery. These are key qualities the award looks for.

✔ Celebrate your volunteers publicly

This builds visibility and helps potential nominators understand the value of your work (and of course makes your volunteers feel valued too!).

FINAL THOUGHTS…

Preparing for The King's Award for Voluntary Service is a chance to:

- Reflect on your volunteers' contributions
- Strengthen your organisation's story
- Celebrate your impact in the community
- Build lasting connections with partners and supporters

This means that even being nominated is a significant honour, and a powerful recognition of the difference your volunteers make!

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