

Virtual Volunteering Toolkit

1. What is virtual volunteering?

Virtual volunteering means volunteer tasks completed, in whole or in part, via the Internet and a home or work computer or a hand held device (mobile phone/tablet). It's also known as online volunteering, cyber service, telementoring, teletutoring, and various other names. Virtual volunteering allows agencies to expand the benefits of their volunteer programs, by allowing for more volunteers to participate, and by utilizing volunteers in new areas.

2. Why use Virtual Volunteers?

The internet provides an excellent way to augment your organization's volunteer recruitment methods. The Internet can also provide new ways to involve volunteers, and to involve volunteers who may not be able to participate in your traditional opportunities. However, online methods will not replace traditional volunteer recruitment methods, nor traditional ways of involving volunteers.

- Potential volunteers who are not reached by traditional offline means may be reached online.
- Some people prefer to communicate this way.
- E-mail provides a quick and easy way to communicate with current volunteers
- Volunteers can network with each other via the Internet
- Virtual Volunteering programs allow for the participation of people who might find onsite volunteering difficult or impossible because of a disability, home obligation or work schedule.
- Involving offsite volunteers via the Internet extends the resources of your organization.

3. Types of Virtual Volunteering:

These can be divided into 2 main types:

- a. Technical assistance provided by online volunteers to staff or other volunteers at an agency. Such assistance usually involves task or objective-based assignments, or the volunteer providing a particular expertise to the agency. This would include volunteers who work off-site, using a computer and the Internet:
 - conducting online research
 - providing professional consulting expertise
 - keeping track of legislation that could affect an agency's clients, etc.
 - translating a document into another language

- providing multimedia expertise
 - designing an agency's newsletter or brochure, or copy editing
 - proofreading drafts of paper and online publications
 - researching and writing articles for brochures, newsletters, web sites, etc.
 - making sure a Web site is accessible for people with disabilities
 - managing other volunteers in the aforementioned activities
- b. Direct contact between a volunteer and a client / recipient of service. For example, a volunteer, via e-mail or a chat room, could:
- electronically visit with someone who is homebound, in a hospital or a rest home; this can be done in addition to onsite, in-person visits
 - provide online mentoring and instruction via e-mail or private intranet
 - help with language instruction (for instance, help people learning English)
 - staff an e-mail or chat room answer/support line
 - supervise or moderate an agency-sponsored chat room, e-mail discussion group or newsgroup
 - work with other volunteers and/or clients to create a project, such as gathering history information relating to a particular time or region, to post on a web site or use in printed material
 - distance learning: training volunteers in a subject via the Internet
 - volunteers who supervise any of the above activities via the Internet and provide guidance, or ask for staff guidance, as appropriate

4. Before you begin:

Many organisations already successfully involve volunteers in traditional, face-to-face settings, either assisting staff and / or working directly with clients so the extension to virtual volunteering can be very quick.

These organisations already have an established system for volunteer recruitment, screening, matching to assignments, management, feedback and evaluation.

For organisations new to volunteering, it is best to think about the necessary policies and procedures needed to utilise volunteers are available here to download.

Ideally, there should be one person who is ultimately responsible for volunteer management at your organization.

5. Implementing a virtual volunteering program:

In terms of starting a virtual volunteering programme, consider what tasks or roles you already have that could be virtual; you may already have these volunteers, already screen and manage them.

Things to consider:

- Who on your staff team already involves volunteers in their work?
- Who on your staff team is in need of research (such as statistics in support of a program, or research for potential grants?)?
- Which volunteers are already engaged in projects they might be able to do from home or work computers?
- How "wired" are these volunteers? (do they have regular email/Internet access)?
- Would they be enthusiastic about doing some of their volunteer services in a virtual setting?
- Make sure you have role descriptions for each role including hours allotted to role
- Don't force virtual volunteering on anyone – this may not be for everyone
- Think about how you will support your virtual volunteers and how you will monitor and evaluate their work.

6. Inducting and Screening Volunteers Online

Your online screening process should be similar to the one you use for on-site volunteers.

You may require potential volunteers to provide you with professional references and/o a CRB check depending on the role you are looking to fill.

7. Supporting Virtual Volunteers:

- Stay in regular contact
- Monitor and evaluate their work
- Log their hours and celebrate their achievements
- Involve them in all discussions and feedback.