Virtual Volunteerism 101

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VIRTUAL VOLUNTEERISM:
volunteer activities that do not require in-person engagement and can be done remotely from someone’s home or another remote location.

20-400% increase in virtual volunteerism since March 2020.
Are you currently engaging volunteers virtually?
Why do Virtual Volunteering?
Why do it (post pandemic)?

**LOWER YOUR COSTS**
Minimize space and resource burdens and potentially reallocate budget

**BROADEN YOUR REACH**
Improve your ability to engage volunteers via different mediums

**DIVERSIFY YOUR VOLUNTEERS**
Gain access to volunteers who otherwise could not travel or participate

**MINIMIZE YOUR UNCERTAINTY**
With weather, transportation and other potential issues

**GAIN ADDITIONAL CAPACITY**
Greater opportunity to address more org needs and gain internal capacity; virtual medium also allows for new and innovative ideas and opportunities
LIMITATIONS OF VIRTUAL

- Harder to create community among volunteers and offer networking/team building opportunities
- Some organizational needs cannot be met through virtual engagement
- Traditional low-cost and turnkey strategies for acknowledgment and recognition (e.g. refreshments, t-shirts, etc.) are not available
- Less opportunity for photos and visibility via social media, website, annual reports, etc.
- Volunteers and staff may be resistant to change and/or lack familiarity with technology tools
- Virtual can’t replace face to face in terms of awareness-building and connection with an org/community
YOUR ORG’S EXPERIENCE OR WITH VIRTUAL VOLUNTEERING?

If you’ve done it...

● What has gone well that you can build on?
● What has been challenging that you may need to think about or work on?

If you haven’t …

● What are some reasons it makes sense for your org to consider (does anything on slide 7 resonate?)
● Are there any barriers to virtual volunteering that you anticipate at your org?
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Building Your Virtual Volunteering Strategy
ASSESS YOUR NEEDS AND DEVELOP STRONG OPPORTUNITIES

Craft a well-thought out strategy and plan for volunteer projects and roles, and consider the staff time and investment needed in order for activities to be impactful and well-run.

STEP 1
ASSESS NEEDS

STEP 2
DEVELOP SCOPE

STEP 3
CREATE ROLES
STEP 1:

Identify organizational needs and volunteer activities to support those needs

- Assess organizational needs
  - Survey staff to surface gaps, pain points, unmet needs at org
  - Talk to staff in all areas of the org
  - Identify clunky processes within the org and conduct process analyses to determine if volunteer support could help
  - Consider impacts of COVID and what holes it has created
  - Consider needs that would build staff capacity

- Translate needs to volunteer opportunities
  - Identify which needs might benefit from volunteer support
  - Determine if virtual engagement is a good fit
  - Think outside the box and explore new ideas
  - Consider skills-based volunteer activities
  - Prioritize based on need, effort required and org capacity to manage
For each activity, articulate how it helps org meet mission and goals.

Finalize Format
- Ongoing or One-Time
- Individual or Team/Group
- Cadence/Frequency

Identify Requirements to set volunteers up for success
- Skills/Experience/Subject Matter Expertise
- Technology/Facilitation
- Training/materials/supplies/tools

Determine staffing needs for coordination and management

Estimate total cost to org
- Don’t be afraid to charge groups and corporates for virtual engagements

Evaluate if it is feasible and makes sense for the org
- Be realistic - is the impact worth the input?

Establish success metrics and determine how outcomes will be tracked and evaluated

STEP 2: Scope Project
Details: how would it all work?
STEP 3: Develop Clear Position Description

Create a clear overview:
- Explain volunteer role/responsibilities
- Communicate timeline, format and expectations for the project and/or role
- Be explicit about technology/tools
- Include necessary skills and experience

Make it compelling - particularly important for virtual
- Share details about the community/individuals/issue area their work will impact; explain how the volunteer role connects to the mission of the org
- Articulate the value proposition for volunteers

If piloting a new virtual opportunity for the first time, state that to set realistic expectations for volunteers and alert them that their feedback will be requested
What are some key needs/gaps/challenges at your org right now?

Could any of them benefit from engaging volunteers virtually?

How would it all work? Think through all of the details with colleagues.
EXAMPLES OF VIRTUAL VOLUNTEER ACTIVITIES

- Advocacy: education/awareness-building + letter writing
- Subject Matter Presentations to Students
- Translation Services
- Social Media Ambassadors
- Phone Banking (e.g., securing vaccine appts for seniors)
- Tutoring
- Virtual card writing/expressing support
- Read alouds to younger students
- Tracking bird populations and migration patterns
- VITA Tax Preparation Assistance
- Localized bulb planting with virtual training and planting kit
03

Recruiting Your Virtual Volunteers
STEP 1: Finding Virtual Volunteers

- Publish role descriptions to volunteer networks
  - Sites: AARP Create the Good, VolunteerMatch, POL, etc
  - Identify relevant networks that align with the role
  - Include whether the volunteer(s) needs to be in a certain geography or it’s open

- Spread the word via your org’s networks - go broad
  - Social Media: LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram
  - Leverage current volunteers and stakeholders
  - Engage partner organizations and businesses with broader reach

- Create a link or landing page to capture volunteer interest
  - Request skills, interests, professional/volunteer history, availability
  - Keep it simple: ask only for the info you plan to use
  - Keep data for reference when looking for future volunteers
STEP 2:

Screening Virtual Volunteers

- Conduct interviews where relevant - via phone or a video conferencing platform
- Confirm requirements and expectations (including schedule) for the volunteer role; offer opportunities for volunteers to ask questions
- Be explicit about process and technology needed to volunteer and ask if they are comfortable or require support or training
- Maintain standard screening policies (background/reference checks) for roles where that’s needed
Planning for and Managing Virtual Volunteers
STEP 1:
Planning:
Volunteers and Org will benefit from being prepared

- Plan for the virtual environment
  - For large events, consider breakout rooms to allow smaller groups to convene and connect with icebreakers
  - Consider virtual “office hours” for volunteers (and clients) to drop in for support and questions
  - Create tutorials, FAQs, one-pagers that address format, logistics and technology
  - Practice scenarios volunteers and clients may encounter in a virtual setting
  - Stay connected with clients/partner orgs/community to ensure they have the support and training needed
  - Virtual alternatives for sign-in sheets, feedback surveys, etc.
  - Consider keeping orientations and trainings virtual to make it easier for more people to participate

- Plan and Evaluate
  - Ensure project is meeting org needs, community needs, volunteer needs
  - Keep feedback loops open with all stakeholders to keep making it better
**STEP 2:**

### Onboarding and Managing Volunteers Virtually

#### Onboarding Virtual Volunteers
- Make introductions to staff and other volunteers
- Ensure volunteers know where to go with questions and feedback
- Share background about the organization, programs, yourself
- Include volunteers on org newsletters and other key updates
- Review any necessary trainings or pre-work

#### Managing Volunteers for Success
- Provide clear direction
- Communicate & establish ongoing check-ins
- Make volunteers a part of the team
- Send e-calendar invites for all activities
- Listen and create easy feedback channels
- Build Trust and Ownership
- Share impact of volunteer activities regularly
- Recognize & acknowledge volunteers
Staying Connected in a Virtual Setting
STEP 1:

**Build Relationships & Foster Connection Virtually**

- **Build community and make it fun**
  - Weekly or monthly virtual happy hour or “office hours” for volunteers to chat with staff about challenges, ideas, etc.
  - Team building activities for connections and networking: games, trivia, guest speakers
  - Awareness building and education: guest speaker, advocacy opportunities
  - Build moments of connection into each volunteer activity

- **Find ways to celebrate and acknowledge volunteer contributions**
  - Shout-outs in newsletters and online forums, e-cards, emails from senior leaders, Seamless e-gift card for virtual events for volunteer leaders, etc.
  - Quantify and share impact regularly

- **Create online forums for volunteers**
  - Consider creating venues for volunteer connection (e.g. Slack, Facebook, etc.)
  - Share stories, ask questions, invite volunteers to share about their experiences via blogs, video interviews, etc.
IF VIRTUAL VOLUNTEERISM ISN’T A FIT FOR YOUR ORG:

- Stay connected with your volunteer network
  - Check in by phone/email/zoom
  - Add volunteers to org newsletters to keep them informed
  - Invite volunteers to be online ambassadors and share stories and impact on blogs/website, etc.
  - Host monthly networking or guest speaker events to maintain awareness and keep volunteers informed and engaged

- Consider other avenues for volunteers
  - Partner with other orgs in your community or orgs working on similar issues to create joint opportunities
  - Identify advocacy or fundraising needs that volunteers may have an interest in supporting
  - Tap top volunteer leads to help rethink volunteerism at your org post-Covid → how can we come back better than before?

STEP 2:
Leverage Virtual Engagement to Stay Connected
- Ensure org has proper tools and systems set up for virtual engagement
  - ✓ If needed, reach out to funders for additional support

- Zoom/WebEx/GoToMeeting
  - ✓ Familiarize with features on video platforms/collaboration tools
  - ✓ Establish a paid account with more features and no time limits
  - ✓ Explore recording trainings and orientations for efficiency

- Identify best platforms for communication and messaging (what makes sense for your org and your volunteers)
  - ✓ Slack, Gchat, Facebook, What’s App

- Allow 5-10 min at start of every agenda for log-ons/tech issues/quick tutorials on key features to ensure everyone is comfortable and present

- Establish technology norms for the activity based on size and format

- Tap a second colleague or trusted volunteer to support when facilitating larger virtual groups: monitoring waiting room, chat, doing breakouts

- Create an FAQ or one-pager re: technology logistics to share with volunteer - send in advance with any pre-activity requests

- Ensure leads are comfortable with the technology and always do a test run
DO I HAVE THE PROPER TOOLS & SYSTEMS SET UP FOR A VIRTUAL ENVIRONMENT?

- Does my organization have internet access? Do we have sufficient bandwidth for video calls and streaming?
- Does my volunteer base have access to phones/computers/internet? Have they been accessible through these technologies for previous communication?
- Do my clients/community have the access and technology tools needed to participate in virtual activities?
- Do my volunteers prefer email, text, or calls for communication?
- What are the most critical goals and best practices for typical volunteer activities at my org? How can I find ways to replicate those in the virtual environment?
Thank You

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questions?