



Virtual Volunteering

Key Issues

- Virtual volunteers are needed by many organizations and there are many varieties of volunteer opportunities.
- Not all virtual volunteering opportunities are via the computer.
- All age groups can be virtual volunteers.

Virtual volunteering means volunteer tasks completed, in whole or in part, via the Internet and a home or work computer. It's also known as online volunteering, cyber service, online mentoring, 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.

Visit <http://www.serviceleader.org/new/virtual/> for a clearinghouse of resources on the topic.

Best Practices

Think of ways your organization can benefit from volunteers who serve remotely. Anyone with time, a desire to make a difference, and a computer can help your organization:

- Research topics
- Edit documents
- Develop web sites
- Write proposals
- Create curriculum
- Tutor students
- Design graphics
- Edit video

Additionally, consider virtual volunteers with specific skills such as:

- Legal
- Financial
- Environmental
- Information technology
- Project management

Source:

<http://mysuperchargedlife.com/blog/become-a-virtual-volunteer-and-make-a-real-difference/>

Use virtual service opportunities to engage volunteers who might have time constraints, physical limitations, or home-based obligations.

Source:

http://www.aarpmagazine.org/lifestyle/virtual_volunteering.html

Consider virtual volunteer opportunities that don't require a computer.

- A retiree in New York who loves cats but can't have a pet because she is out of the country three months each year. Instead, she fosters cats for the ASPCA. For periods ranging from one to eight months, French takes home cats from the ASPCA's shelter who are sick, pregnant, or have behavioral problems. The ASPCA provides food, cat litter, medicine, and other supplies, as well as veterinary care at their clinic. When she returns them to the ASPCA, she writes a resume for each cat that is given to the people that are interested in adopting it.
- A volunteer in New Jersey phones elderly community members who live alone. If they don't answer, he calls their family members, friends, the security office at their apartment building, or—if necessary—the police, to stop by and see if they are in trouble.
- A volunteer in North Carolina spends 1500 hours a year crocheting blankets for Warm Up America!, an organization that collects afghans and donates them to charitable agencies that serve the homeless, battered women, victims of disasters, and other people in need. She crochets the blankets at her home and then delivers them to a local partner of the organization.

Source:

http://www.aarpmagazine.org/lifestyle/virtual_volunteering.html

When recruiting and managing virtual volunteers, be clear about expectations and responsibilities.

Volunteering from a home computer is very different from working on-site with a nonprofit. Virtual volunteering offers more flexibility in the use of your time and a greater degree of independence. However, these reasons can also make virtual volunteering more difficult, requiring much more self-discipline on the part of the volunteer.

The Haas Center for Public Service at Stanford University offers these self-assessment questions for potential virtual volunteers:

- Do you have regular access to the internet?
- Are you comfortable working on your own?
- Do you know how to communicate well in writing?
- Can you stick to deadlines?
- Do you check your e-mail on a regular basis?
- Is this a suitable time for you to apply for a volunteering project?
- Are you sure you are capable of producing a high-quality result?
- Are you comfortable collaborating with people who might be from different cultural backgrounds and who might hold different sets of values than your own?

Source:

<http://haas.stanford.edu/index.php/item/849>

Check out the online volunteering service from the United Nations at
<http://www.volunteeringonline.org/>