Three Ways to Engage Volunteers From Home

MANAGING REMOTELY

For many organisations managing volunteers remotely is a new and challenging task.

When done with careful thought and attention it can be a sustainable and diverse way to involve volunteers in your organisation, and may become a welcome long-term addition to your volunteer programme.

This guide will look at three different ways you can engage volunteers remotely and some common challenges you may encounter.

Follow Volunteer Ireland's #VolunteerFromHome campaign for inspiration on how others are getting involved.

#VolunteerFromHome

VIRTUAL VOLUNTEERING

Use technology to connect and support almost any volunteer role

MICROVOLUNTEERING

Use the power of the crowd to get help with large or ongoing projects

PHYSICAL VOLUNTEERING

Crafting, writing or phone calls - volunteer activities that can be done from home that don't require familiarity with technology

VIRTUAL VOLUNTEERING

Virtual volunteering is a term describing a volunteer who completes tasks off-site from the organisation, by using technology such as a computer, tablet, or phone. The organisation and volunteer will communicate over the internet, by email or through phone calls and the volunteer completes their tasks from their own home.

Virtual Volunteering was around long before COVID-19, but has become increasingly more popular because of the current restrictions.

Virtual volunteering can involve standard volunteer roles with varying levels of commitment. You may involve ongoing volunteers, who complete similar activities each week, you may involve volunteers in one-off projects or tasks or you may involve volunteers with a specific skill set in an area in which you need support.

Common examples of virtual volunteering include administrative support, data entry, social media promotion and management, copy writing, graphic design, website development, or support with HR, grant writing, research or finance.

Read the Volunteer Ireland guide on 'Developing Roles For Volunteers at Home' to get started with creating roles for volunteers at home.

MICROVOLUNTEERING

Microvolunteering is defined as bite-sized, on-demand, no commitment actions that benefit a worthy cause. Volunteers usually complete a small piece of a larger task, almost always online. With dozens or even hundreds of volunteers contributing, large projects can be completed quickly and accurately.

Microvolunteering works well for projects where a large amount of information needs to be gathered or digitised. This could involve volunteers contributing to research or sending in wildlife information they gather. Volunteers could help identify and describe an archive of images or photographs or they could transcribe images and texts gathered from museums or libraries.

As we know, volunteering is good for us! At a time when people may be feeling fearful and anxious, being able to do something small but meaningful may help individuals cope with the current challenges.

Are there any long running projects or pieces of research that your organisation would like to complete? Could you harness the power of a crowd?

For some examples of microvolunteering to get you inspired, check out Volunteer Ireland's microvolunteering oportunities webpage.

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PHYSICAL VOLUNTEERING

Another way we can involve volunteers from their homes is through practical tasks. This may be a way to engage those who are less familiar with technology. Particularly now as we try to mobilise a community response to COVID-19, there are several practical ways volunteers can help from home. Some examples are:

- Engaging youth groups to write letters to nursing home residents or their older neighbours

- Engaging retirement groups to knit items for patients in hospital

- Engaging people to start collecting an oral or written history of the times we are living in

- Telephone Support / Befriending

CHALLENGES

Managing volunteers remotely comes with its own challenges both for the volunteer and the volunteer manager.

Fear: There is a feeling of fear in the air these days and on top of the general fear about COVID-19, when moving to volunteer from home there can be the fear of having to use new technology, change, and a lack of purpose.

Isolation: Many of your volunteers could be 'people' people. They are motivated by social interaction and by being a part of something bigger. Volunteering in isolation from others can be very challenging for these volunteers.

Loss of Connection: It can be much harder to feel connected to service users and to fellow volunteers and staff when volunteering remotely.

The good news is that you, as experienced volunteer managers already know what to do to overcome these challenges. As always, the answers lie in best practice in preparing, recruiting, supporting and thanking your volunteers. Check out the next two guides in this series 'Developing Volunteer Roles for Volunteers at Hom' and 'Training and Communication for Volunteers at Home' for tips on how to overcom these challenges.

Read the other guides in this series:

- Developing Roles for Volunteers at Home

- Training and Communication for Volunteers at Home

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