Tips for Optimising Virtual Volunteering

TIPS FOR MANAGING VIRTUAL VOLUNTEER ROLES

With the growth in virtual communications, volunteering organisations are embracing new ways to support their community and people in need through virtual volunteering, by adapting existing roles and creating new ones.

Engaging volunteers through virtual volunteer roles is an effective way to:

- Keep existing volunteers engaged,
- Reconnect with past volunteers, and
- Attract new volunteers, including younger, diverse, skilled and short term volunteers.

VIRTUAL VOLUNTEER ROLES

Virtual volunteering (also known as e-volunteering and online volunteering) takes place using the internet, computers, social media and mobile devices. Activities can be carried out from the volunteer's home, office or anywhere in the world that has digital access.

Activities suitable for virtual volunteering

- Writing, proofing or editing activities such as newsletters, articles, reports, website, social media content, letter writing, card making, story writing and transcribing.
- Research and information gathering.
- Fundraising, advocacy or PR campaign generation and implementation.
- IT based activities e.g. website design, setting up Facebook pages, content management, data entry or management, coding and applications development.
- Mentoring and teaching activities online, e.g. helping children with school work, or adults with life skills, or teaching fitness, singing, to play music, to speak a new language or master a new skill.
- Emotional or practical support roles, including welfare check in calls, help lines and counselling.
- Organise shared entertainment activities such as playing games, undertaking a craft, choirs or bands.
- Organising shared discussion activities, e.g. book clubs, movie clubs, coffee clubs.
- Professional skilled roles such as graphic design, reviewing or preparing documentation, reports, plans and strategies eg around risk management, cyber security, marketing, business planning, contracts and HR procedures.
- Not-for-profit governance activities.
- There are also remote volunteering activities that occur away from an organisations' operations without the use of technology (such as sewing scrubs or cooking meals). These volunteer roles may benefit from many of the same considerations as for virtual volunteering.

Things to remember

1. Virtual volunteering can break down barriers to volunteering. It opens up possibilities for people who might not otherwise be able to volunteer with your organisation.

2. Ask potential volunteers to suggest activities they would like to do that would also achieve your objectives.

3. When advertising, be clear about the scope of the role, the technology, skills, time, commitment, reporting, and training required and the recruitment process.

4. Include the benefits for the volunteer in your advertisements (e.g. gain work experience, up-skill, change the world, make connections or improve mental health).

5. When recruiting, include current and past volunteers in the call out. They may like a change of role or know someone else who would be interested.

6. Be ready to interview applicants over the phone by email or video call.

7. It is still important to undertake a risk assessment of the role and follow relevant screening procedures. Although face to face contact is not involved, the virtual volunteer may deal with personal and confidential information or have virtual contact with vulnerable people.

8. The volunteer organisation is legally responsible for the health and safety of virtual volunteers, just as on-site volunteers and employees. This includes 'working from home' considerations.

9. Check organisation's insurance to ensure it is adequate.

10. An investment in up-to-date technology to facilitate communications with virtual volunteers may be needed.

11. Induction and training for virtual volunteers may best be delivered online. This may require an investment in developing training modules.

12. As part of the induction, virtual volunteers need to understand and accept your organisation's code of conduct, including representing your organisation and respecting boundaries and confidentiality.

13. There should be a designated contact for virtual volunteers.

14. Virtual volunteers may not need the same level of contact or engagement as traditional on-site volunteers. Find out what they need and adapt your procedures accordingly, so they feel connected and part of the bigger picture if this is important for them.

15. When it comes to performance monitoring, it will be necessary to check in with volunteers and possibly implement standard reporting procedures, such as a regular time to check in, or an activity report.

16. Clients and customers should also know the point of contact for feedback regarding their experience of the volunteering activity.

17. Recognising contributions and impact is just as important for virtual volunteers. Some creativity may be needed to find ways of doing this online rather than face-to-face.

If you have any questions please contact Volunteering WA.

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