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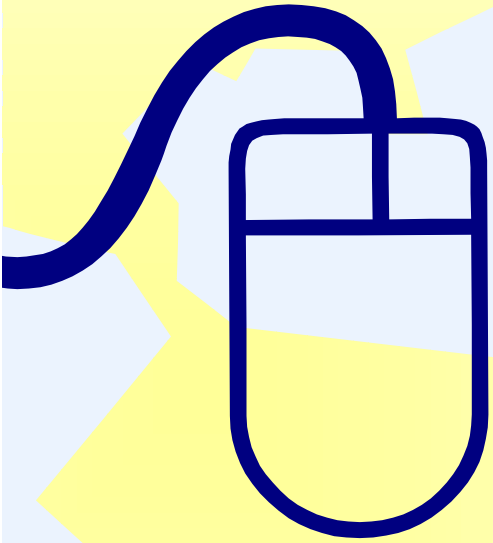
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The Virtual Volunteering Guidebook



How to Apply the Principles of Real-World Volunteer Management to Online Service

by

Susan J. Ellis & Jayne Cravens

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The Virtual Volunteering Guidebook

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Please note that information on the World Wide Web is transitory. Therefore, some of the Web sites and other Internet addresses referenced in this book may become out of date. For the most current information possible, readers are encouraged to visit the Virtual Volunteering Project Web site at: http://www.serviceleader.org/vv

The Virtual Volunteering Project
http://www.serviceleader.org/vv/
part of the Charles A. Dana Center, University of Texas at Austin

Energize INC.
...especially for leaders of volunteers
http://www.energizeinc.com

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The Virtual Volunteering Guidebook

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Foreword

This *Guidebook* represents both an end and a beginning. As a document, (published electronically, as befits its subject matter), it analyzes and disseminates what was learned during the two years of the Pilot Phase of the Virtual Volunteering Project, 1996-1998. The initial study period is over and what was once simply a futuristic concept is now real service activity, conducted online by volunteers and program managers around the world.

The Virtual Volunteering Project was launched by Impact Online (IOL) in 1996 to encourage and assist in the development of volunteer activities that can be completed off-site via the Internet. Steve Glikbarg and Cindy Shove, co-founders of IOL, were two of the first people to label online service as "virtual volunteering." Steve and Cindy had been talking about and benefiting from online volunteering since 1994, when IOL first went on the Web. Their organization's own programs and services would not have come into being without the contributions of numerous volunteers, on and off-line. They obtained funding for the Virtual Volunteering Project after contact with numerous individuals around the United States who wanted to offer help via the Internet but could not find agencies to assist.

Funders and Home Sites

During its Pilot Phase, the Virtual Volunteering (VV) Project was made possible by the generous support of the James Irvine Foundation. Additional support came from the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, the Morino Institute, and the Mitsubishi Electric America Foundation. The Project moved to the Center for Volunteerism and Community Engagement at the Charles A. Dana Center, University of Texas at Austin, in the Fall of 1998.

Readers who were frequent visitors to the original VV Project site on Impact Online will recognize much of the information in this *Guidebook*. Jayne Cravens posted an enormous amount of material as it evolved. Her Web essays have been edited and incorporated into this book, along with new content. The most recent version of the Virtual Volunteering Project Web site and resources are now available at: http://www.serviceleader.org/vv/. Impact Online actively continues to promote online service via its centerpiece program, VolunteerMatch: http://www.volunteermatch.org.

About Impact Online

Impact Online (IOL) is a nonprofit organization dedicated to increasing volunteerism through the Internet. IOL offers VolunteerMatch, the nation's most popular online database of volunteer opportunities. Whether it's building a house for Habitat for Humanity, organizing an arts and crafts fair for inner city children, or participating in an AIDS walk-a-thon, VolunteerMatch provides information on volunteer events that fit everyone's interests and schedules.

IOL's partnerships include for-profit and nonprofit organizations. For example, in San Francisco, nonprofit partners include the Volunteer Center of San Francisco, the Volunteer Center of San Mateo, Street Project and two City Cares organizations: Hands On San Francisco and Community Impact. Impact Online receives *pro bono* advertising from Yahoo and Excite, which provides national and local exposure for nonprofit partners and their volunteer opportunities.

The IOL Web site has received several awards, including: Netscape Communications' "What's Cool" list; America Online's "Site of the Week"; Microsoft Network's "Weekly Top Pick"; and USA Today's "Hot Site" award.

Pilot Phase: The Virtual Volunteering Demonstration Project

The information in this *Guidebook* has been compiled through collaboration with agencies who involve or have involved volunteers virtually, feedback from individuals who have provided volunteer support to an agency via a home or work computer, and the VV Project Team's own firsthand experiences working with real-world and online volunteers. Related resources, such as information about telecommuting or publications to help organizations involve people with disabilities as volunteers, have also been researched.

The VV Project's Pilot Phase Team was comprised of one paid project manager (Jayne Cravens), six advisors, twelve affiliate agencies and more than 70 online volunteers. Former IOL employees and volunteers and many informal collaborating agencies also contributed immensely to the accomplishments of the VV Project.

The advisors were: Cheryl Cole Dodwell; Susan J. Ellis (who also served as Documenting Consultant); Steve Glikbarg; Sarah Jane Rehnborg; and Cindy Shove. Their bios appear in Appendix A.

Enormous thanks goes to the representatives of the original twelve Virtual Volunteering Project Affiliates who were selected based on their knowledge of basic volunteer issues; their success with volunteers in traditional, face-to-face settings; their vision for virtual volunteering at their organization; their commitment to the affiliate guidelines; their knowledge of basic Internet navigation and use; and their demonstrated commitment to timely communications via e-mail. The Affiliates were:

- Arizona Pioneers' Home Volunteers Association, Prescott, Arizona
- Austin Freenet, Austin, Texas
- Boulder Community Network (BCN), Boulder, Colorado
- Community Wire, Glendale, California
- Evergreen State Society Seattle, Washington agency serving all of Washington State
- Glaucoma Research Foundation, national organization based in San Francisco, California
- LibertyNet, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
- Oregon Literacy, Inc. (OLI), serving Oregon and Southwest Washington state
- San Jose Children's Musical Theater, San Jose, California

- Sidelines National Support Network, national organization based in California
- SmartGrrls, Austin, Texas
- TxServe, Austin, Texas-based organization serving Texas

For more detailed information about these Affiliates, see Appendix A. The enthusiasm of the Affiliates was clear in all their communications. One example is this e-mail from Brenda Ruth, at the time the Volunteer Coordinator at Boulder Community Network (BCN):

> *BCN wants to be a part of the affiliate program because it represents a future that we can barely imagine. We also are familiar with the national recognition of Impact Online...BCN wants to build in numbers of volunteers and non-profits served, but also increase the community beyond physical county borders.*
>
> *Impact Online is a means for people making a difference to connect and share ideas and have easy access to information. Each of the affiliates has a specific role and services they give. Each is unique, but part of a whole movement in bringing people together and making a difference in their communities, BCN's participation is truly in pursuit of a network. The present affiliates, BCN, Volunteer Match and Impact Online are bringing people together with shared interests and the social outcomes that are yet unseen, and that is exhilarating. Any type of volunteering impacts people's lives and virtual volunteering opens avenues for people who are shy to do "soup kitchen lines" or have some disability that prevents them. Virtual volunteering is a way to get these people involved in the greater community and BCN want to be a part of that.*

The VV Project could not have asked for better collaborators to get this project started.

Acknowledgements

Special thanks to Steve Glikbarg and Sarah Jane Rehnborg who, in different ways, both offered vital support to the Virtual Volunteering Project at critical times. Their vision and faith were as important as the financial assistance obtained.

Liz Schrader, Publications Director at Energize, Inc., worked long and hard to design the look of this electronic publication so that it is readable both on a computer screen and printed out on paper. Thank you, Liz! Also thanks to Alex Stroukoff who generously contributed technical advice during the formatting effort.

We are immeasurably grateful to the agencies and volunteers who contributed so many ideas and hours to the launch of the Virtual Volunteering Project, proving that the strength and soul of cyberspace is the people who connect within it.

The Virtual Volunteering Guidebook

Part I
Answering Your Basic Questions

The Virtual Volunteering Project
http://www.serviceleader.org/vv/
part of the Charles A. Dana Center, University of Texas at Austin

Energize INC.
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Introduction

Welcome to a brave new world! Internet technology has changed society in many unexpected ways. As we enter the new millennium, the ability to communicate online has evolved a truly fresh and distinct form of service to others: "virtual volunteering." The *volunteers* are real; it's the service they provide that is done electronically. Volunteering and volunteer program management have entered the electronic age in full force. This *Guidebook* is designed to help leaders of volunteer projects apply the skills of real-world volunteer management to cyberspace.

What Is "Virtual Volunteering"?

"Virtual volunteering" refers to 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, telementoring, teletutoring and various other names.

The concept is not meant as a substitute for traditional "in person" volunteering. In fact, one of the most exciting things about this innovative use of technology is that it is adding both to the quantity of service contributed and to attracting people who have not necessarily volunteered before. Virtual volunteering offers greater access to community resources and provides more ways for people to support community groups, nonprofit agencies, schools and other organizations. For some people, service online will be a preferred avenue of volunteering but, for most, it will be an additional way of contributing time and talent.

Most organizations which involve online volunteers do so in addition to welcoming on-site volunteers. Also, only a few online volunteers work solely via the Internet. Often a combination of on-site and online tasks for volunteers works best for everyone involved (volunteers, staff, clients). As will be described later, assignments can have different levels of virtuality. For instance, one volunteer may interact with clients online but meet on-site with a staff member regularly; another may talk with a client via e-mail in addition to regular face-to-face visits.

Why Involve Online Volunteers?

Online volunteers, just as those who come on site, extend the resources of an organization. The additional help augments staff resources and allows an organization to reach more clients.

There are many good reasons to involve volunteers via online technologies, as well as to use the Internet for recruitment of on-site volunteers:

- Potential volunteers not reached by traditional off-line means may be reached online.
- There are people who don't read the newspaper's column on volunteer opportunities or who don't read bulletins from the local volunteer center, but who would, indeed, love to volunteer and are easily reached online via the World Wide Web and appropriate Internet discussion groups.
- People who prefer not to volunteer on-site may be willing to do so via their home or work computers.
- Setting out expectations online allows prospective volunteers to self-screen their interests before contacting an agency.
- Some people prefer to communicate via online means. Dashing off an e-mail or filling out an online sign-up sheet is more convenient and, for some people, preferable to calling an organization.
- Virtual volunteering programs allow for the participation of people who might find on-site volunteering difficult or impossible because of a disability, mobility issue, home obligation or work schedule. This, in turn, allows agencies to benefit from the additional talent and resources of more volunteers.
- People in their 20s and 30s are more prone to use the resources of the Internet than other age groups and like the novelty and convenience of finding and signing up for either on-site or virtual volunteering via this technology. These younger volunteers can turn into long-time supporters, including becoming financial donors.
- Online volunteers are environmentally friendly—no car exhausts, less paper waste, etc.

What Can Someone Do as an Online Volunteer?

The Virtual Volunteering Project has defined two categories of online volunteering: technical assistance and direct contact with clients.

Technical Assistance

"Technical assistance" assignments utilize the expertise of a volunteer to support paid staff or other volunteers at an agency, and usually involve accomplishing a project or reaching an objective. The results are readily visible: a final product, a report, etc. E-mail is the main form of communication as the work progresses.

Here are just a few examples of what a volunteer can do to provide virtual technical assistance:

- *conduct online research*: find information to use in an agency's upcoming grant proposal or newsletter, gather information on a particular government program or legislation that affects an agency's clients, gather Web site addresses of similarly-focused organizations, etc.

- *provide professional consulting expertise*: answer an agency's questions regarding human resource, accounting, management or legal issues, write a speech, develop a strategic plan for a particular department, etc.

- *conduct online outreach and advocacy*: post information to appropriate newsgroups and electronic lists, prepare legislative alerts to be sent via e-mail, etc.

- design an agency's newsletter or brochure, or copy edit an agency's publication or proposal

- design a logo for an agency or program

- translate a document into another language

- prepare information for an agency's World Wide Web site

- make sure a Web site is accessible for people using assistive technologies

- register an agency's Web home page and other appropriate pages with online search engines, directories and "What's New" sites

- design a database

- do daily searches for news articles relating to an organization or a particular topic

- provide an online orientation to all volunteers with Internet access (whether or not they are on-site or online volunteers), or survey volunteers via e-mail about their experiences with an agency or program

Direct Client Contact

Most organizations readily see the potential of involving volunteers in doing virtual technical assistance. A much more complex subject is how to create electronic links between a volunteer and a client or other recipient of service. This subject is discussed in more detail later, but here are some ideas for what an online volunteer could do with or for a client:

- electronically "visit" with someone who is homebound, in a hospital or a rest home; this can be done in addition to on-site, in-person visits

- provide online mentoring and instruction via e-mail or private intranet (helping students with homework questions, helping an adult learn a skill or find a job, or help prison inmates with studies or programs)

- help with language instruction (for instance, help people learning English)

- staff an e-mail or chat room answer/support line, just like a telephone answer/support line, where people write in questions and trained volunteers answer them; or, be part of an online support group, where members provide advice to each other via a chat room, electronic discussion list or newsgroup

- supervise or moderate an agency-sponsored chat room, listserv or newsgroup

- provide advance "welcoming" of people about to enter the hospital, go to summer camp, etc. from volunteers, via e-mail or a special Web page or intranet, and post-service follow up to the same group via e-mail or the Web

- work with other volunteers and/or clients to create a project, such as writing about the news of their neighborhood, school, special interest group, etc., or gathering historical information relating to a particular time or region, to post on a Web site or use in printed material

- create distance learning opportunities, such as training volunteers in a subject via the Internet

- supervise any of the above activities via the Internet and provide guidance, or ask for staff guidance, as appropriate

Who Is this *Guidebook* For?

This *Guidebook* has been written for organizations which already have a functioning on-site, face-to-face volunteer program. We therefore are working from the assumption that readers understand the basic principles of volunteer management and how to work with volunteers effectively in traditional settings. We cannot teach the fundamentals of volunteer management here. However, the index of “Online Resources for Volunteer Managers” in Appendix B has links to Internet and print resources that provide such information. Also, because of the ever-changing nature of Web sites, we highly recommend that you log onto the VV Project Web site for the most up-to-the-minute references: http://www.serviceleader.org/vv.

Further, we must assume that *Guidebook* readers are Internet connected and have accessibility to e-mail and the Web. If you are still a beginner in cyberspace, or are even reading this in paper print-out form, you will not find an introduction to the Internet here. We urge you to become familiar—and comfortable—with this new medium before attempting to initiate any virtual volunteering project. Recruit some new volunteers with expertise in the Internet and make their primary assignment training *you*.

How Do I Know If My Organization Is Ready for Virtual Volunteering?

Before your organization decides to involve volunteers virtually, do some self-evaluation of both yourself and your organization. Based on our own experience and feedback from other organizations, we suggest your organization meet the following criteria before it attempts to engage in virtual volunteering:

- Your organization should already successfully involve volunteers in traditional, face-to-face settings and you should therefore already have an established system for volunteer recruitment, screening, matching to assignments, supervision, feedback and evaluation (measures of success for both volunteer assignments and for your volunteer program in general).

- The entire staff and board should understand how your organization involves volunteers off-line, and be committed to the success of your existing volunteer program. They should know how to route calls from volunteers and inquiries from potential volunteers.

- All of your organization's staff should have training and/or experience in the basic how's and why's of volunteer supervision and management. You should also have an established system for staff members to define and communicate to you volunteer assignment needs in their own areas/departments (e.g., the development office needs volunteers for a special event, to write grants, etc.).

- There should be one person who is ultimately responsible for volunteer management at your organization. This person should oversee your organization's volunteer management process, including evaluation, and should understand the basic legal requirements associated with volunteer involvement (or at least know where to get such questions answered). AND, this person should have regular access to an Internet e-mail account during workday hours.

- The same person who is in charge of managing your current volunteer program should also manage the virtual volunteering component. Don't think of virtual volunteering as a different program; instead, think of it as an extension of your existing, off-line volunteer program.

- Your organization should already ask for and compile e-mail addresses of volunteers and other supporters, just as you ask for the postal mailing addresses and phone numbers for these people.

- The volunteer manager and any staff who might work with online volunteers are committed to reading and responding to e-mails regarding volunteering with your organization within 48 hours of receipt.

We also suggest that you be able to access the Virtual Volunteering Web site for advice and information on involving volunteers virtually.

A well-organized, responsive agency volunteer program is a key element to virtual volunteering success. Good organization does not come from funding; it comes from thoughtful application of existing resources and commitment to developing the best program system. Having the above criteria in place before engaging online volunteers will prevent a significant increase in administrative burdens as well as ensure quality and success for the program. If you feel you meet all of the above criteria, you are ready to start setting up and managing a virtual volunteering program.

How Do I Set Up a Virtual Volunteering Program?

Managing online volunteers is not vastly different from managing people on-site: it involves basic management skills such as setting and communicating goals, assessing progress and giving regular feedback. Agencies that already have volunteers working off-site, in the field, won't find it altogether foreign territory to work with volunteers virtually. For that matter, most volunteer managers don't see on-site volunteers every moment either.

Managing volunteers virtually even affords managers several benefits, such as having an automatic, extensive written record of volunteer activities (via e-mail and chat archives). Still, in a virtual environment, some adjustments in style and approaches to volunteer management must be made to ensure success. For instance, volunteers working via home or work computers can feel isolated or undervalued, and gradually lose their inspiration for the work your organization is doing.

Involving volunteers via the Internet comes naturally to some people. For others, there is a significant learning curve. Keep in mind that not all of the information here may be applicable to your organization or to every manager. Also remember that this is new territory for all of us! We're all still learning how to make the most of this exciting new medium.

The best volunteer programs pay attention to the thirteen major elements of successful volunteer management:

13 MAJOR ELEMENTS OF SUCCESSFUL VOLUNTEER MANAGEMENT

1. PLANNING AND RESOURCE ALLOCATION
2. VOLUNTEER WORK DESIGN
3. RECRUITMENT/PUBLIC RELATIONS
4. INTERVIEWING, SCREENING, AND MATCHING
5. ORIENTATION
6. TRAINING
7. VOLUNTEER/EMPLOYEE RELATIONS
8. COORDINATION
9. SUPERVISION
10. EVALUATION
11. RECOGNITION
12. RECORDKEEPING AND REPORTING
13. VOLUNTEER INPUT

In the following chapters, we'll take each of these elements in turn and see how it must be adapted to meet the demands of virtual volunteering situations. But first, let's consider the context for all of virtual volunteering: how we can integrate the technology of the Internet into volunteer program management.



Chapter 1

Integrating the Internet into Volunteer Management

More Experience than You May Think

Once you start exploring the techniques of recruiting and working with online volunteers, you'll soon discover that this process is not as different from traditional volunteer management as you may think. Not only do all the principles and best practices of working with any volunteers apply, but there are already ways volunteers contribute time that are very relevant to electronic service.

Consider all the issues involved in working with off-site or field volunteers. Yes, you may meet these people face-to-face initially and do on-site training, but then these volunteers do their work at a distance from you or other supervisors. Here are just a few examples:

- youth group leaders
- friendly visitors and driver/escorts
- chore service volunteers
- coaches and sports league officials
- tutors and mentors who meet with their assigned client at a mutually-convenient site
- speakers bureau volunteers
- telephone reassurance programs

Obviously organizations have long ago resolved their concerns about allowing such volunteers the freedom to do their work, make judgement calls, and act responsibly without constant staff surveillance. The challenges of communicating with volunteers in the field, conveying updated information, and gathering report data are (as we will see) actually harder than for online volunteers.

If you are at the national or state level of an organization with local affiliates, you work with another variation of "field" volunteers. Again, you face the challenge of motivating, informing, and monitoring activities at a distance.

One of the unexpected results of the VV Project Pilot Phase was our discovery of how cyberspace volunteer management was as applicable to working with these and other "real-life" volunteers as it is to working with

online volunteers. In fact, some of the techniques in the following chapters work exceptionally well for contact with off-site volunteers, especially as more and more people have access to e-mail as a routine thing. Let's look at what electronic technology holds for us.

The Benefits and Challenges of Cyberspace

Internet technology has several unique capabilities:

- It offers immediacy—the speed of communication is almost instantaneous.
- You can send a limitless number of messages with almost no length limit and at almost no cost.
- Communication is asynchronous, so you can access and send data whenever it's convenient to you, while your contacts can do the same—time zones become unimportant.
- Geographic location also becomes irrelevant, as you can communicate anywhere in the world at the same speed and cost. It therefore reduces the isolation of rural areas and of people who are homebound.
- Online communication is not as intrusive as a telephone call and does not require instant reaction. This allows for more continuous and thoughtful interaction that is more convenient for all parties.
- Cyberspace breaks down barriers: distance, nationalities, size of organizations. It is also a great equalizer, offering people with physical disabilities a level playing field and making one's age or appearance less important than one's online contributions.
- While lack of wide public accessibility to the Internet is still of legitimate concern, more people gain access daily. There is every reason to believe that, in the near future, having an e-mail address (at least) will be as common as owning a television—in fact, the two technologies may ultimately merge.

However, we are not Pollyannas on the subject of the Internet. Here are some realistic concerns about cyberspace:

- It *does* take time! There is nothing virtual about that! Online communication has not necessarily substituted for other forms of contact, so e-mail can initially add more activity into already-busy days (the expression "drowning in e-mails" is heard often). Moreover, seeking information on the Internet can be extremely time-consuming, particularly if you have slow hardware and the sites you are accessing insist on giving you lots of graphics. Jayne Cravens calls WWW the "world wide wait"!

- Cyberspace can seem impersonal. Although there is plenty of evidence that people form communities online, this takes practice and the ability to "sense" the presence of others. High tech, low touch.

- As already mentioned, the issues of cost and accessibility for people of little means cannot be taken lightly.

- More critical, yet often hidden, is the question of literacy. In order to make the most of cyberspace today, someone must be a good—and fast—reader. Spellchecker programs notwithstanding, communicating online also requires writing ability. Unfortunately, there are too many people with below-average literacy skills for whom the Internet is a frustrating and time-consuming obstacle course. Proficiency in the English language is also required, which may be an added problem for some.

- The Internet has evolved a unique culture. Newcomers can be intimidated by the rules of "netiquette."

- The technology changes constantly and is often confusing. Many feel insecure about upgrades, computer viruses, and the like.

- Some managers have legitimate concerns about data security and confidentiality, particularly when dealing with vulnerable populations.

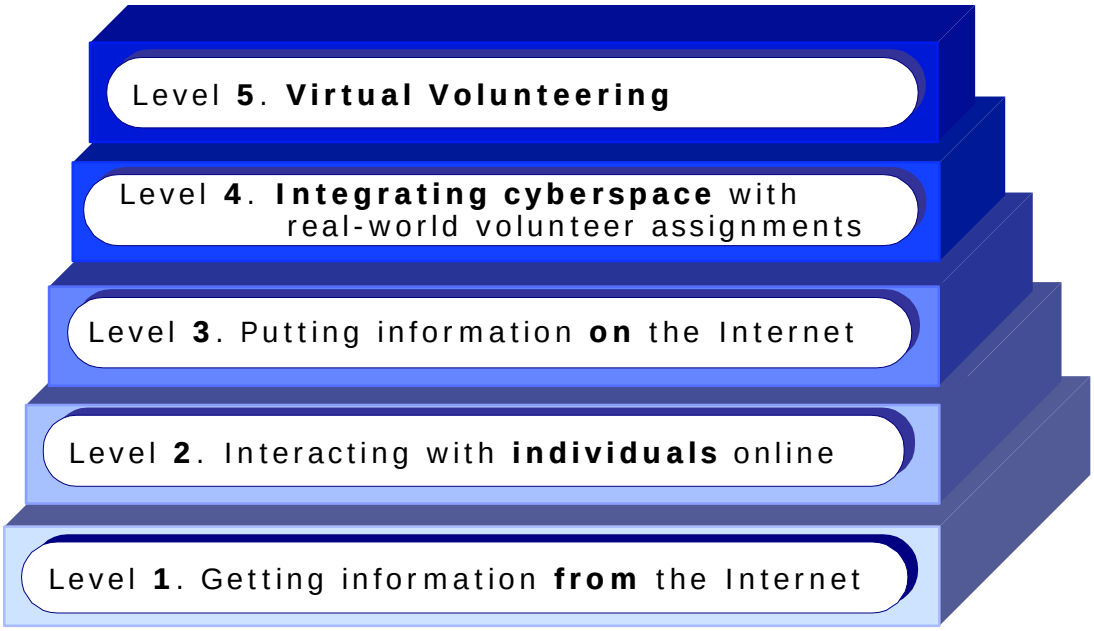
- The idea of virtual volunteering raises discomfort in not seeing the volunteer in person. And, from the perspective of the online volunteer, it takes some imagination and staying power to feel connected to an organization through a keyboard.

The volunteer program manager who wishes to initiate some type of virtual volunteering activity must anticipate the possible negative reactions of both co-workers and volunteers. Expect some initial resistance and start slowly. Emphasize the positives and potential of cyberspace and prove the value of online service one successful assignment at a time.

The "Degrees of Virtuality"

There are various ways a volunteer program manager can use electronic technology to run a volunteer program, with what we call virtual volunteering being the most intensive use of the medium. Over the past few years, Susan Ellis has identified a five-level scale she has dubbed the "Degrees of Virtuality," starting with simple Internet participation and ascending to virtual volunteering.[1]

Degrees of "Virtuality"



Let's examine each level in more detail.

Level 1 Getting information **from** the Internet

This most basic level involves Internet/Web research on any and all subjects that can be used in volunteer program design, volunteer and employee orientation and training, newsletters and other communication. It also includes professional development information on techniques of volunteer management, trends and issues in the field, model projects tested elsewhere, etc.

Level 2 Interacting with **individuals** online

This is the use of e-mail, both one-to-one and among selected groups of individuals. It can be to/from volunteers in your program or anyone else. Beyond simple e-mail, one can subscribe to online discussion groups (often called listservs) and newsgroups to communicate with people sharing similar interests or common concerns. The number of volunteer-ism-centered interactive sites is growing quickly (see Appendix B and http://www.serviceleader.org/vv or http://www.energizeinc.com).

Note that such interacting can be very personal, in that you can ask a question and colleagues will share many answers (or vice versa), which makes it enormously helpful—like having a private consultant at your fingertips. Make use of this on behalf of volunteers, too. Introduce them to

one another online and let them ask each other questions, or subscribe to listservs and newsgroups relevant to their assignment.

We'll take a more in-depth look at using e-mail communication as a vital tool in managing a volunteer program in Chapters 4, 5 and 8.

Level 3 Putting information **on** the Internet

The next level of virtuality is more proactive and involves consciously using the power of the World Wide Web to do outreach. For example, consider ways you might use your agency's or even a specific Web site to make your volunteer program visible, provide recognition for volunteer achievements, and recruit for open positions (more on recruiting via the Web in Chapter 3).

Offer the expertise of your organization to other Web sites reaching audiences who will find such material useful. For example, depending on the type of services you perform, develop short essays with tips and practical suggestions that other Web sites will see as valuable to their visitors. In exchange, ask for a "hot" or "hyper" link back to your site. This sort of posting and linking offers unlimited opportunities for targeting the types of people you most want to reach as prospective volunteers.

Level 4 **Integrating cyberspace** with real-world volunteer assignments

Even if you never work with any online volunteers, you will find that cyberspace is an incredible tool to assist in daily volunteer program development and management. Here are just a few ideas that will be re-visited in detail in later chapters:

- Recruit volunteers on the Web:
  - Use your agency Web site to highlight volunteer involvement and an up-to-the-minute list of available assignments.
  - Find local and national sites that allow you to post volunteer opportunities at no charge (you must keep such postings updated to be of use!).
  - Revel in target marketing heaven! If you need volunteers with special credentials or skills, find specialized Web sites and listservs that bring such people together online and ask for their help.
- Communicate by e-mail with volunteers to keep motivation high, share hot news, elicit feedback. While the "feel" of such correspondence is highly personal, you can generate a mass mailing to all volunteers at a touch of the send button.

- Publish volunteer and constituent newsletters electronically. It may be a while before you can replace printed mailings, but as a greater percentage of volunteers go online, you might be able to limit the hard-copy pieces in favor of more frequent, shorter, and cheaper online updates.

- Develop cyberspace reporting systems. Think about how you can increase your response rate if you send an easy monthly report "form" by e-mail to everyone and ask for data in reply.

- Stimulate and encourage mutual exchange directly among volunteers, especially those in similar assignments, through virtual bulletin boards, newsgroups for volunteers in similar assignments, and live scheduled "chats."

- Provide distance learning opportunities:

  - Designate password-access Web pages and post anything of educational value to volunteers: handouts from training sessions; newsbriefs; relevant newspaper articles; updated policies and procedures.

  - Post audio tapes of orientation and training sessions—and soon video, too. Then create online "quizzes" to test information learned so that volunteers who cannot attend a live training session in person can schedule their own "make up" session and demonstrate they've taken the course.

Level 5 Virtual Volunteering

Within this highest degree of virtuality there are, in turn, four ascending levels of intensity:

As part of a real-world assignment:

Electronic communication can be "value-added" to current levels of volunteering. For example, a mentor or tutor who normally visits face-to-face with a client might add some mid-week e-mail contact (if accessible to the client, of course, but even young students increasingly can receive e-mail in the classroom) or maintain contact while away on a business trip.

Doing research and outreach for you, your agency, the volunteer program, or other departments:

This involves recruiting what has been called "Cyber Deputies."[2] These are volunteers who enjoy computer work and have the skill to conduct Internet searches on any subject, find sites for you to post volunteer opportunities, etc. They can also represent you on discussion

group lists, be assigned to monitor specific newsgroups and Web sites, and do other time-consuming cyberspace activities.

Assigned to agency projects:

This category includes all the online assignments one would think of as providing "technical assistance"—applying existing expertise to a project assigned by the staff. This can range from various sorts of "brain work" (consultation, reviewing, critiquing and advising) to producing a product, such as Web design and monitoring.

Assigned to clients:

At the top of the scale is virtual volunteering that assigns an online volunteer to provide some sort of direct assistance to a client/consumer. This includes all sorts of services in which the client benefits from electronic access to the volunteer, either for information or for more emotional support. Various projects are already demonstrating how mentoring and other one-to-one relationships can evolve in cyberspace. There is a burgeoning number of online self-help groups, bringing together people from all over the world who, isolated in their geographic sites, have a problem or issue they want to share with others similarly affected. The possibilities are still emerging, as the participants in the Virtual Volunteering Pilot Project demonstrate.

This *Guidebook*, of course, focuses on the top of the scale of virtuality. But it may be useful for readers to consider how they can build toward a virtual volunteering program by integrating the power of e-mail and the Internet into more traditional volunteer management activities.

Online Comfort Level

It's difficult to talk about setting up a virtual volunteering program as a step-by-step process because every organization is different and may need to implement some suggestions in a different order than presented in this *Guidebook*.

While one key to a successful volunteer program is good volunteer management, a second key—equally important—is a high comfort level in online communication and culture. Although we do not go into detail about this subject until Chapter 8, be aware from the start that Internet skills belong in your volunteer management toolbox.

If you are not already corresponding via e-mail daily, particularly with people you have not met in person, we suggest that you look for and join an online discussion group. This can be a group relating to your professional life, such as CyberVPM (a discussion group for volunteer program managers; see Appendix B), or a group that discusses something you

enjoy in your personal life, from a hobby to your favorite television show. There are suggestions for how to find such groups in Chapter 3.

Join one really active group or a few moderately busy ones—don't get overwhelmed. You can just read messages without posting any yourself (this is called "lurking") or you can interact with the group. Whichever you choose, this will be an excellent exercise to prepare you for managing online volunteers.

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1 "The Degrees of Virtuality," © 1998, Energize, Inc., http://www.energizeinc.com.

2 With thanks to Glenn Schreiber who coined the term "cyber deputy" in 1996 while volunteering with Susan Ellis in running a film discussion singles group in Philadelphia.

The Virtual Volunteering Guidebook

Part II
Online Volunteer Management

The Virtual Volunteering Project
http://www.serviceleader.org/vv/
part of the Charles A. Dana Center, University of Texas at Austin

Energize INC.
...especially for leaders of volunteers
http://www.energizeinc.com

ImpactOnline
http://www.impactonline.org



Chapter 2

Virtual Volunteering Work Design

Laying the Groundwork

The first of the thirteen fundamental elements of volunteer program management (see Introduction) is "Planning and Resource Allocation." Any planning you would do for any new volunteer activity will be applicable here, too. But there are a few special needs to consider in preparing for online volunteers.

Have the right equipment and online services available, which means easy accessibility to a computer and the Internet, a high-speed modem, and access to technical advisors (whether expert volunteers or your agency's staff). You must have your own e-mail address. Sharing an e-mailbox is awkward and slows communication. It is equally important to check whether the people who volunteer virtually have the right equipment and Internet service, too. All of this costs money, so budget in advance.

Now it's time to set goals so that everyone knows what you want to accomplish through virtual volunteering assignments. Start small. A pilot project is the best approach; you can expand as you learn the ropes (see Chapter 7). When you have articulated achievable goals, you can then coach volunteers towards those goals, and later evaluate and recognize success.

Amend any policies and procedures manuals relating to volunteers to cover volunteers working virtually. For instance, what is your reimbursement policy for expenses a volunteer might incur working via the Internet? You may want to state in your policies that volunteers working virtually must provide their own equipment (computer, modem, software, Internet Service Provider, etc.), and that all expenses must be approved by the volunteer's staff contact before they are actually incurred if the volunteer wants to be reimbursed. You should also define in your policies what would be grounds for dismissal of an online volunteer, such as:

- posting information on behalf of your organization to Internet discussion groups without written approval;
- misrepresenting your organization in a written communication;
- transferring confidential information, including passwords, to third parties.

Use your current written policies as a guide for defining the boundaries for your online volunteers. For two examples of policies for online volunteers, see:

> *"Handbook for Online Volunteers, by the Virtual Volunteering Project"*
> http://www.serviceleader.org/vv/handbook
>
> *"Code of Conduct for CyberAngels Volunteers"*
> http://www.cyberangels.org/about/code_of_conduct.html

Once you've determined that your organization is ready for virtual volunteering, it's time for some internal groundwork: getting staff buy-in and participation; developing an implementation plan; training staff and volunteers. But the most critical task awaiting you is developing the assignments you will ask online volunteers to fulfill.

Virtual Volunteering Work Design

Just as with any other type of volunteering, the first step in creating online tasks for volunteers is to look around and see what needs to be done. When thinking about possible virtual volunteering tasks, start by examining what existing volunteers already do for staff and clients. Could you add an online component to one of your existing volunteer activities? Before identifying assignments that could involve volunteers virtually, your organization must first have a clear understanding of the various objectives and tasks of all staff members and current volunteers. Then you can determine if there are components of these tasks that could be completed off-site by a volunteer working via a home or work computer and the Internet.

But don't stop there. This new medium has all sorts of new potential. We are all learning what the Internet can do to expand our services beyond what we might have imagined. It is in this realm that virtual volunteering is most exciting. In many cases, you will be engaging volunteers in experimental work—testing new ways of service provision as well as widely expanding your organization's sphere of influence. For the first time you can think globally—and act on it!

In their publication, *Successful Management in the Virtual Office*, Bernie Kelly and Bruce McGraw identify the following categories of tasks as appropriate for telecommuting jobs, and they are also appropriate for virtual volunteering:

Virtual Volunteering and Telecommuting Jobs

- Administrative
- Analysis
- Calculating
- Data analysis
- Data entry
- Data manipulation
- Data processing
- Data programming
- Maintaining databases
- Meeting with clients
- Planning
- Project-oriented work/management
- Reading
- Recordkeeping
- Research
- Sending/receiving electronic mail
- Spreadsheet analysis
- Support activities
- Thinking
- Typing
- Using a computer
- Word processing
- Writing

Other advice for creating virtual assignments comes from telecommuting manuals, which suggest identifying:

- tasks that can be evaluated primarily by qualitative rather than quantitative results;
- tasks that do not involve high security or handling of proprietary data;
- information-handling jobs that require computers; and
- individual contributor jobs not dependent on a team environment to accomplish tasks.

The VV Project's Web site details even more examples of online volunteering tasks.

Tapping Expertise

The power of cyberspace is that it can connect you with just about any knowledge base you need. Individuals with specialized training or credentials—anywhere in the world—can now be recruited as technical advisors. No travel time or costs. Just succinct e-mail exchanges.

Help your staff to let their imaginations soar. What types of information or advice would help them to do their work to the highest standards? How about:

- access to a child psychiatrist for questions about clients in crisis?
- feedback on a press release from a newspaper editor, before mailing out 500 copies?
- having a "think tank" of five experts who can toss an idea around to assess and expand it?
- access to translating materials into any language under the sun?

Virtual volunteering makes these types of technical assistance feasible because experts can be recruited online, never have to come on-site for meetings (less time consuming for them), and can contribute something truly helpful in manageable e-mails.

The key to successful online technical assistance is the art of asking good questions, the more specific the better. The more open-ended and vague, the poorer the chances of receiving a useful answer. No expert has the time or energy to do a "brain dump" of everything s/he knows.

Remember, too, that sometimes a telephone call is more efficient than e-mail! Allow the volunteer this option whenever possible.

"Byte-Sized" Assignments

From our experience in the Pilot Phase, the VV Project suggests new online volunteers start off with a simple assignment that will show both of you what is truly involved in this type of service. The volunteer will experience the unique aspects of virtual volunteering and you will have a trial run to get acquainted with the work of the newcomer.

Assign tasks that can be completed in five hours or less, with a deadline of two weeks after the assignment is made. This gives the volunteer a definite time boundary for working with you. If you both find the first experience satisfactory, the volunteer can take on another assignment. If things do not work out as hoped, this initial trial run offers a natural break point to halt the volunteer's involvement.

Some possible assignments to try with a first-time online volunteer at your organization include:

- online research of any sort
- converting an e-mail newsletter to a Web page for your site
- writing (or editing) an article, press release, or anything else and submitting it via e-mail
- Web site proofreading with IBM/clone PC if the agency uses Macs, or vice versa
- Web site proofreading with a browser other than what your agency uses in-house
- compiling or updating a list of Internet discussion groups relating to a particular topic, or a list of Web sites of organizations sharing an interest in your organization's mission, or a list of publications with a particular focus
- compiling a calendar of conferences and events with a particular focus—with Web addresses of where to find more information
- doing a Web search to seek out resources that are needed for specific clients: summer camps; vocational training; etc.
- checking out the requirements of various funders, such as foundations, by accessing grant proposal submission information online

- adding .HTML codes to make Web pages accessible for people using assistive technologies

- converting Web pages from English into another language

Increasing Responsibility

Once the volunteer has successfully completed an initial assignment, you may want to assign something longer, or make several short-term assignments at once. We suggest something that takes up to ten hours to complete and has a deadline of four weeks after the assignment is made. This further eases the volunteer into the process of contributing virtually and gives you more of an indication of his or her strengths and interests. This again gives you both natural stopping points—places where either the volunteer or you can terminate the relationship as necessary, or where you can ask the volunteer to go through a more detailed screening process, such as submission of references, writing samples, etc., to move into a longer-term volunteer role.

If the volunteer completes these short-term assignments and you both agree to proceed, give the volunteer a more intensive assignment, or several short-term assignments together. However, we suggest that these longer assignments be no more than three to six months at a time. Again, this gives both you and the volunteer natural stopping points for assessment of how things are going and, if necessary, further screening, training, or termination of the relationship.

Benchmarks

Give volunteers short-term goals or benchmarks within a larger project. When these are reached, you both can look at what the volunteer has completed, re-evaluate the volunteer's expectations and availability (these things do change), and decide how best to proceed. Don't automatically assume that volunteers are going to be around for several months, particularly if you have never worked with them before.

Direct Client Contact Online

So far we have been talking mainly about technical assistance volunteer opportunities in which volunteers work with staff and other volunteers, but not with clients. But virtual volunteering can bring together volunteers and clients in meaningful, productive scenarios, as many organizations have already discovered.

Direct contact volunteers work directly with a client/recipient of your service online. You might start with the easiest idea of all: give volunteers and clients who are already working together in the real world the option of also conversing via e-mail. For example, if a volunteer mentor can spend time face-to-face with his or her client once a week, why not add to

the quantity of contact by encouraging phone calls or e-mail on other days? Think of how this makes it possible for people with busy travel schedules to maintain a regular commitment to a client. This is all a gradual introduction to “virtual volunteering” without even using the words!

There are many ways to create new services for clients or consumers through virtual volunteering. For example, a volunteer, via e-mail or a chat room, could:

- electronically "visit" with someone who is homebound, or in a hospital or nursing home, or with someone geographically isolated
- provide online mentoring and instruction via e-mail (helping students with homework questions, helping an adult learn a skill or find a job, or help prison inmates with studies or programs)
- help with language instruction (for people learning English) by allowing clients the chance to practice writing skills via e-mail
- staff an e-mail or chat room answer/support line, like a phone answer/support line, where people write their questions and volunteers answer them
- offer advance "welcoming" of people about to enter the hospital, go to summer camp, etc., and then do post-service follow up of the same group
- work together with clients online to create a project, such as writing about the news of their neighborhood, school, special interest group, etc. to post on a Web site or use in printed material
- conduct distance learning: training on a subject via the Internet

Also consider how cyberspace gives you the chance to reach out to totally new groups of consumers. Because time and geography are less important, transportation issues become moot. You can even run a service for insomniacs! People who have temporary or permanent physical disabilities can also easily be welcomed into your organization’s circle as volunteers.

You might not even have to recruit new volunteers. For instance, you could encourage clients to engage in self-help by forming an online support group. Group members provide advice to each other via a chat room or private e-mail discussion group (see the VV Project Web site for forming and facilitating such a group).

Finally, you can assign volunteers to coordinate, facilitate, supervise, or moderate any of the above activities via the Internet. These virtual supervisors can provide guidance directly or can alert staff when some

intervention is necessary. Cyberspace also provides a way for former on-site volunteers to remain connected with you, perhaps to act as online trainers or advisors to their successors.

It is true that developing a direct service virtual volunteering program presents many special challenges. What would be the most appropriate assignments? How will you screen these volunteers? How will you supervise and evaluate these volunteers' interactions with clients? How will you protect confidentiality and prevent inappropriate interactions between volunteers and clients in virtual situations? The following chapters will address such issues.

Put It in Writing

It is now standard operating procedure for volunteer programs to develop written position descriptions for volunteers. This step is even more important in cyberspace, where your communication is totally written already. Whether an assignment is short-term or ongoing, product-based or relationship-building, take the time to articulate exactly what you are asking of the volunteer. Include such important points as:

- How will you both know when the task has been completed or certain benchmarks have been reached? What is the ultimate deadline? Are there internal deadlines?
- What will the reporting procedure be: how often and in what form?
- What information or other tools will be needed to do the work successfully and who will provide these?
- Who at the agency is the volunteer's main contact person?
- What orientation and/or training will you offer and do you expect the volunteer to complete such sessions before tackling the work?

One of the benefits of the Internet is that you can actually write a much more detailed position description than one you might put on paper. For example, you can describe a research project and imbed a link to another Web page giving more information about the project. Or you can link to sample work produced by other volunteers. In other words, the prospective volunteer can read in depth about the assignment as s/he self-screens her or his interest.

All of this boils down to clarifying expectations. Remember, too, that you are promising the support of your organization at the same time you are asking a commitment of the volunteer. If you send the online volunteer an e-mail with the position description, ask the person to send it back to you with an added line accepting the responsibility. If the assignment warrants it, you can always postal-mail two copies of the description,

asking the volunteer to sign one and return it to you by mail as well. This provides a permanent record of your agreement.

Many volunteers who work virtually with your organization will work only on a short-term basis, because of personal preference; they may complete one project in two weeks and then withdraw from your program, content with this short-term virtual experience. This is not uncommon and some of the management tips here may not be necessary in such short-term cases. Following the suggestions in this *Guidebook* for recruitment and for online orientation should help you identify such volunteers early.



Chapter 3
Recruiting Online Volunteers

As in real-world volunteer program development, you should not recruit online volunteers until you have meaningful roles for such volunteers to fill. In fact, the way in which you construct and articulate an assignment directly identifies who might be enticed to join you. The steps to successful volunteer recruitment all start with the position description. Where you look for a Web designer will clearly be a different place than you might look for someone to translate a fact sheet into Japanese. In the same vein, the tools you will need to reach out to prospective volunteers will depend upon where you are looking. The way you present the volunteer opportunity in a posting to a specialized newsgroup will differ (in words and length) from how you might describe the work if you are giving a speech to a computer programming class.

It may strike you as strange to learn that the Virtual Volunteering Project began by recruiting volunteers off-line, using the same publicity channels as for any other type of volunteer assignment. So, assuming that you are indeed out there in the real world seeking various people to fill other volunteer slots, add virtual volunteering assignments to your information. Make sure that you register online work in all existing directories, such as Volunteer Center listings. Speak about online opportunities as well as off-line ones when you make presentations to groups.

Target Your Audiences

The most successful recruiting is accomplished through targeted marketing. Spend some time (perhaps with a group of advisors) thinking about the following two questions:

1. What are the skills or credentials, and technical equipment, our online assignments require?

2. Where are we most likely to find people with those skills/credentials/equipment?

Again, your answers must match each distinct volunteer position. The point initially is to brainstorm as many ideas as possible about potential sources of volunteers—whether or not you know how you might approach such sources. Techniques come later!

So, when the Sidelines National Support Network wants to find women with high-risk pregnancies, their list might include:

- obstetricians' offices
- fertility clinics

- home nursing services
- midwife programs
- childbirth education classes
- stores that sell home health care products such as special pillows, back support, etc.

On the other hand, if the Virtual Volunteering Project wants to involve more people with disabilities as volunteers, these sources would be sensible contact points:

- Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation
- the MIS departments of large agencies that serve disabled populations, such as Goodwill or United Cerebral Palsy
- disability rights groups
- computer classes in special ed. schools (for both students and teachers, by the way)

From these two very different lists, you can see that the strategies you might use for spreading the word of your volunteer opportunities will vary as well. Off-line, you might employ techniques such as:

- bulletin board flyers
- contacting the head of the computer department for referrals
- making a presentation to a class

Online you will use the electronic equivalents of such activities. The many options open to you are outlined below.

Regardless of your recruitment technique, make sure you are ready to act when applicants respond to your outreach. The number one complaint we hear from volunteers is that agencies said they needed volunteers, but were not ready to put them to work immediately, sometimes not even responding to the offer of help. Keep in mind that volunteer recruitment is most effective when it is a year-round effort involving a variety of techniques designed to reach a diverse group. Use of many different approaches will yield the most success, since not all interested persons can be reached by a single method.

Marketing Volunteer Opportunities Online[1]

Naturally the Internet provides all sorts of avenues for spreading your message electronically. This section is as relevant to finding off-line volunteers as online ones. Even if someone will physically work on-site at your agency, you may very well find him or her via electronic means.

Marketing volunteer opportunities online won't replace your off-line recruitment methods; it will augment them by reaching new audiences in new ways. Before you start posting your volunteer information into cyberspace, however, some words of caution:

"Golden Rule" of Recruitment

Do NOT recruit volunteers online (or off-line, for that matter) until you have well-defined, written volunteer assignment descriptions, and you have an immediate next step for people who call or e-mail about these opportunities (a date for a face-to-face meeting or orientation, for instance).

Asking for volunteers but not having a method to immediately place them into your volunteer program is like advertising a product you don't really have, and it can cause hard feelings about your agency on the part of potential supporters. If your organization cannot or does not answer e-mail within 48 hours of receipt, don't include your e-mail address as a way for potential volunteers to contact you. Instead, in your online announcements, direct volunteers to telephone you. The VV Project has heard from many people who read about an agency's volunteer opportunities online and e-mailed their interest in helping, but then were never contacted and, after weeks of waiting, went on to other volunteer assignments with bad feelings toward the agency they originally wanted to assist.

Make sure those who answer your agency's phone know you are posting information to the Internet, in case there is an increase in phone calls regarding volunteer opportunities or in people referring to "that e-mail you posted."

When providing volunteer information online, whether in the form of an announcement or a Web page, remember to include your organization's name, postal address, phone number, e-mail address (if this is an acceptable way for potential volunteers to contact you), and Web site address (if you have one).

Reaching out electronically can be time-consuming, not only to post opportunities but to keep the information updated and current. Volunteers can be assigned to search the Web for sites that list volunteer opportunities or targeted places to post recruitment messages. Don't forget to let current on-site volunteers know that you have online opportunities; some of them may prefer doing some of their support for your organization via their home or work computer.

Here are some of the ways the Internet and especially the Web can become recruitment tools for you.

Online Volunteer Opportunity Registries

New Web sites are springing up with the goal of assisting the nonprofit community in general and volunteering in particular. They all share several things in common right now: they are free; you can post and update your entries at will; they allow prospective volunteers to search for opportunities by zip code and by interest; and they are growing in popularity as people become aware of the accessibility of this sort of information online.

Unfortunately, they also share another characteristic: most of the postings are too general and many are out of date. Remember that the Web allows you to be as specific as necessary. Better to post ten detailed position descriptions that really help people to self-screen their interest than to post one “Hometown Agency Needs Help” ad that gives no real information at all. Return to the directory site and delete assignments no longer available or update those that are. And, as we have emphasized repeatedly, do not post at all unless you will contact respondents immediately with a next step!

Impact Online's VolunteerMatch service at http://www.volunteermatch.org is a great place to start testing online directories. When you've registered your organization on VolunteerMatch, you should look into registering on other Web sites that offer ways to promote your volunteer opportunities via their Web sites. For a list of such sites see Appendix B and the VV Project Web site.

Note that most of the commercial online services, such as America Online and CompuServe, have created special interest areas devoted exclusively to community involvement and nonprofit organizations. Subscribers can find a variety of postings giving information about volunteering and how to find the best volunteer opportunities. Agencies can post volunteer needs free of charge. Recruit links to each of the various commercial services by asking volunteers and employees whether they subscribe to any online service at home. Request that they search for community involvement sites and report these to you. E-mail them or give them your recruitment messages electronically and ask that they post them for you.

Online Discussion Groups

Through “newsgroups” and other electronic discussion groups accessed through e-mail, people with mutual interests can communicate amazingly well in cyberspace. When you "subscribe" to an online discussion group (sometimes known as a "listserv") or other electronic publication, your e-mailbox receives all messages posted each day, or you can browse postings via your newsgroup reader (usually your Web browser). Fellow subscribers can be limitless in number and anywhere on the globe.

The point for a recruiter is that online groups gather like-minded individuals who might be candidates as volunteers. It is target marketing heaven. Looking for people who can teach bicycle safety to your teens? Find a bicyclist newsgroup or bulletin board. Want to find an architect with experience in designing tree houses? Dip into an architecture or an outdoor recreation list.

Some lists reject postings that read like an advertisement. Introduce yourself courteously to the discussion group hosts first and ask how best to access their group and if your posting would be appropriate. Explain who (and where) you are and why you are using this format to locate someone with these particular skills.

Lurk before you leap. Get a sense of the audience in a particular group before posting, to make sure that they might be receptive to your information. For instance, don't post volunteer opportunities to the newsgroup soc.org.nonprofit, as this group is made up of nonprofit professionals who are looking for volunteers themselves. Posting inappropriately can result in bad publicity for your organization.

A good place to look for appropriate online discussion groups is via these Web sites, using relevant keywords:

http://www.liszt.com
http://www.tile.net
http://www.neosoft.com/cgi-bin/paml_search/
http://www.dejanews.com

Search for regional newsgroups using the name of the city where you are located and another keyword, such as “volunteer” or, depending on your volunteer position descriptions, “Web design,” “pregnancy,” “tutoring,” etc. You can also try the name of nearby colleges and universities to find Internet discussion groups in your area that might be open to the posting of volunteer opportunities.

Your Organization’s Web Site

A growing number of nonprofit and government organizations are developing Web sites to publicize their work, attract donors, reach prospective clients, communicate their message to anyone interested, and even deliver their services. So, if volunteers are already active in the organization, they ought to be visible on the Web site, too. Work with your organization’s Web designer to post specific pages for volunteer news, recruitment, and recognition. Make sure there is a "hot link" on the home page to connect interested people to information about volunteering in your agency.

The beauty of cyberspace is that you can post absolutely everything you want to share with the public at no printing cost, but those who enter your site can choose to access as much or as little information as they please. The person who looses interest in your material will exit; the prospective volunteer can, in fact, become quite well educated about your work and what you need volunteers to do.

As we have been stressing, it is crucial that you offer a way for people to respond immediately. E-mail is a basic tool. Ideally, you'll have some sort of response mechanism on the page as well, so that an interested person can "click" on "I'm interested, let's go to the next step..." and get a screen with a message form that is delivered electronically back to you. All of this is valid for any applicant, but it goes double for anyone interested in virtual volunteering. If you can't accommodate initial expressions of interest online, maybe you need to rethink your ability to work with online volunteers.

Make sure that there are links to your volunteer information pages on every other page of your Web site. Register your volunteer opportunities/information page with Web search engines and directories. Which ones? Start with the ones you use most. Ask staff and volunteers for their suggestions as well.

Include your organization's Web address on all printed materials (business cards, letterhead, newsletters, fax cover sheets, etc.) right next to your organization's "snail mail" address and phone number. In your mailed newsletter, announce that there is information on volunteering on your Web site. In any newspaper announcements, press releases, PSAs, etc., as well as online announcements regarding volunteer opportunities at your organization, note that there is volunteer information on your World Wide Web site as well. Why do all this? Because many people in your target audiences who visit your Web site do so because of something they have read on paper or been told over the phone, not necessarily because they are looking for it via a Web search engine.

Finally, train everyone who answers your organization's main phone line, as well as your executive director, marketing staff and fund raising staff, to mention that there is volunteer information on the Web site (so they can make appropriate referrals). Also make sure they know how to say the Web address correctly!

If for some reason your organization is unwilling to create its own Web site or to give you the space you need on its site, consider designing a Web page for the volunteer program that is independent of the site of the agency as a whole. Obviously, if you are genuinely interested in establishing a virtual volunteering program, you have to have an electronic presence on online.

E-mail Newsbriefs and Communiqués

Even without a Web site, you can generate electronic communication and send it to a long list of interested people at no printing or postage cost at all. Keep an "address book" of the e-mail addresses of prospective volunteer sources and develop regular news updates to keep your organization on people's minds. Remember that the instant nature of cyberspace allows you to advertise a volunteer assignment the same day it becomes open. Whenever you send out a press release to the traditional media, make an electronic copy and e-mail it out to your Internet contacts, too.

A Few Extra Hints on Finding Technical Assistance Volunteers

Recruiting online volunteers with specific expertise is best done by a combination of online and off-line outreach. To find a volunteer to provide professional or technical assistance for your organization's staff, follow the target marketing suggestions already discussed. Send, by postal mail or e-mail, specific volunteer opportunity announcements to appropriate professional groups or online volunteer centers.

For instance, if you are looking for computer help, try contacting local computer-user groups in your area (find nearby groups via the Association of PC User Groups at: http://www.apcug.org/others). Another good resource is CompuMentor at: http://www.compumentor.org (there is a small fee for agencies; this covers the costs of CompuMentor's screening and administration of the volunteers). CompuMentor has a "Virtual Mentors" program, matching agencies with online volunteer "specialists." For more information, see the VV Web site: http://www.serviceleader.org/vv/findta.html.

For Web-related online volunteering opportunities (Web design, .cgi and .pl scripting, etc.), Microsoft Site Builder Network - VolunteerKiosk at http://www.guidestar.org/classifieds/ms_sbn.adp is an excellent place to post. This is a joint project with GuideStar to connect nonprofit organizations with Web developer and designer volunteers. The Microsoft Site Builder Network is a membership program and online resource that supports Web designers and developers with tools, information, and support.

For more suggestions about where to find technical assistance volunteers, see Appendix B.

A Few Extra Hints about Recruiting College Students

People in college are often looking for unpaid internships as a way to get the experience they need for a career. College students are also probably the most wired population of all. Seek out Web sites for colleges (which often give you the ability to communicate with specific academic departments) and student organizations. As with every other population, you will find various online discussion groups for students. Some college-based job placement sites have options for posting volunteer internship opportunities as well as paid work.

Despite their access to the Internet, students are still reachable off-line, as well. Mail printed announcements regarding your volunteer/unpaid internship opportunities (including virtual assignments) to every college and university in your county. Mail these announcements to these departments and offices:

- career development office
- student volunteer center (which would be happy to help you with your search)

- English department (because such students usually have excellent writing skills and attention to detail)

- departments and offices that are related to your organization's mission or the volunteer opportunity

Today most universities give every student an e-mail address on the school's intranet. Find out if there are any regular e-mailings on campus which might include notice of your virtual volunteering needs.

Keep Current!

Two important issues: timely response and updating your information. Cyberspace is a here-and-now environment. When someone sends an e-mail or a Web message, it is delivered to you instantly. So netiquette demands a reasonably quick response of at least acknowledgment if not a complete answer. Check and deal with your e-mail daily and never less than once every four days. Here is a great assignment for a volunteer who likes computers!

The humorous but ironic term for a Web site that never changes is a "cobWeb." Be sure you are not gathering virtual dust! The whole point of cyberspace is to go beyond the limits of the print media. Your Web page is not simply another newsletter. Once you publish a paper newsletter, it is permanent until replaced by the next edition. Not so on the Web. You can—and should—update postings frequently to make it useful for people to enter your site often. There is a lot of competition on the Web today as new sites appear. What would make someone want to return to your site to see if any new volunteer opportunities are posted?

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[1] Much of the material in this section was adapted from *The Volunteer Recruitment Book*, 2nd edition, by Susan J. Ellis, Energize, Inc., 1996; http://www.energizeinc.com.



Chapter 4

Selecting and Preparing Online Volunteers

The next three volunteer program management elements of "Interviewing, Screening and Matching," "Orientation," and "Training" blend in virtual volunteering.

One of the differences between on-site and online volunteer management is speed. Like it or not, cyberspace generates a sense of immediacy. As we have been saying, the majority of people who express interest in a virtual volunteering opportunity want to get started right away. In this chapter we will discuss an application and orientation/training process that addresses both the issues of immediacy and screening out those who might express interest in virtual volunteering with you before really considering the commitment required.

The experience of the VV Project is that signing up for online opportunities is so easy that, often, people fire off an e-mail saying they want to volunteer before they really think about the time and commitment online volunteering takes. Jayne shares this personal observation:

> *A mistake I made early on was giving assignments to people as soon as they e-mailed interest; the result was that most assignments did not get done, or I gave out the same assignment to more than one volunteer, assuming that at least one of them wouldn't complete the work. To remedy this, I now direct all potential volunteers to an online application. Completing this application is mandatory for being an online volunteer with this project. If a volunteer can't complete this simple form, could they really commit the time and attention necessary for an online assignment?*
>
> *The answers to this form are sent to my e-mail address. Upon receipt and review of this form, I send an e-mail that serves as an online orientation. It provides a very brief history of the Virtual Volunteering Project, details on what the volunteer is committing to by signing up to volunteer with the Project, how assignment progress is tracked, and reporting requirements. Only when the volunteer responds to this orientation is he or she given an assignment.*
>
> *The online application and orientation have dramatically cut down on the number of people who e-mail interest in volunteering but whom I never hear from again after I make the first assignment—I call them "virtual no-shows." When I first began, about 75% of the people who said they wanted to volunteer online with this Project were never heard from again*

after that first e-mail. Now, more than 50% complete the assignments, and about half of those ask for a second assignment. This process has also put me in a much better position to match volunteers with appropriate assignments, and cut way down on the amount of time I spend tracking assignment progress.

Based on this experience, which was echoed by the our collaborating organizations, we recommend that you blend the step of orientation with the entire application and screening system, and automate the process as much as possible.

Your screening and orientation of online volunteers who will work only with agency staff will probably be different from what you will do to select volunteers who will interact directly with your clients and the public—just as in the real world. Obviously, the more sensitive the assignment or the more vulnerable the client to be served, the more careful you will need to be in checking the background of a prospective volunteer. But some of the projects done virtually require tenacity and attention, traits that will only reveal themselves by testing the volunteer with initial assignments. Pick and choose which of the following tips are applicable to each online position you are trying to fill.

Getting Acquainted Online

Be prepared for some back and forth e-mailing with prospective volunteers. Keep the e-mails comparatively short. It's better (and much faster) to exchange a series of brief question-and-answer communiqués rather than pose a multitude of questions and have to wait for the volunteer to write a whole essay in return. On the other hand, some volunteers do not like this approach, preferring to complete the initial process as quickly as possible through fewer, if longer, e-mails.

As you e-mail back and forth with prospective volunteers, you will get a sense of their work style, their written communication skills, and their commitment to your organization. Prospective volunteers may say they will answer e-mails within two business days of receipt, but it's during the screening and orientation process that you will find out if this is so.

If you have an online volunteer application form on your Web site, you will already have some basic information about the applicant. Putting the application on your Web site automates the process—you don't communicate with most prospective volunteers directly until they have completed this form, which frees your time up for other issues. Sample application forms from many different organizations are posted on the Virtual Volunteering Web site.

Start with basic questions, whether on an electronic form or via e-mail: "What made you express interest in our virtual volunteering assignments?" "What types of things would you like to do online as a volunteer?" If appropriate, you might further suggest that the volunteer read certain pages on your Web site carefully for more information before

answering you. You can also ask the applicant to snail or e-mail you a resume or other documentation of his or her background, as well as samples of similar work performed.

Show the applicant that you are reading his/her responses by following up on something s/he wrote. Ask whatever questions you would like to clarify based on the application information. The point is: Don't make every e-mail sound like a "form letter." On-site volunteers wouldn't be motivated by a standardized approach and neither will online volunteers.

Ask questions to get an overview of the resources available to the prospective volunteer as part of a virtual assignment. Confirm that the volunteer has regular access to:

- a computer (what kind?)
- a personal e-mail account (home or work?)
- the Internet, both via e-mail and the Web

You may or may not also need to know the following, depending on the nature of the assignments under consideration:

- Do you know how to use Web search engines? Which ones do you use regularly?
- Do you know how to zip/unzip or stuff/unstuff a file?
- Do you know how to e-mail a document as an attachment?
- What word processing software do you have? spreadsheet software? database software? artwork software? How experienced are you with each of these software packages?
- Do you know how to convert documents to other formats, e.g., one kind of word processing document to another, such as Microsoft Word to Word Perfect? a word processing document to a spread sheet? one kind of database to another?
- Do you know how to import data into a database from another data file?
- Do you know how to export data from a database?
- Have you ever participated in an online chat, and/or been a regular participant of an online discussion group via a listserv or newsgroup? Were you a participant or a moderator?

After the potential volunteer has completed your online application process and answered your questions, you will need to communicate your organization's volunteer policies and code of conduct, and provide an

overview of what will happen next. You can now describe the online assignments available in more detail.

Volunteers will usually tell you exactly what they want to do online for your organization, particularly if you have provided well-written descriptions of potential opportunities at your organization. If you really can't match their skills or interests with what you have available, tell them. Often, the volunteer will still be enthusiastic to help with an existing assignment but, if not, it is only fair to allow him or her to seek elsewhere for a service opportunity. Also, just as in the real world, you do not want to push round pegs into square holes. It is always better to live with a vacancy for a while longer than to place the wrong volunteer into an important assignment and be sorry later.

Matching volunteers to assignments, on or off-line, is a learned skill. The more you do it, the better you will become at matching people to tasks. Be patient, be supportive, and remember that not every volunteer job is right for every volunteer. The better your screening and orientation process, the less chance there is for misunderstandings or incomplete assignments.

Special Screening Concerns

If appropriate for the assignment under consideration, ask for references and follow up on them. Police background checks and similar screening procedures may be legally required, particularly if the volunteer will be matched one-to-one with a child or older person. Handle this exactly as you would for an on-site volunteer applicant. Just be sure you explain that *all* volunteers must undergo this screening, so that online volunteers do not feel you are in any way suspicious of them because you are interacting with them electronically. This may mean online volunteers must come on-site for a face-to-face screening interview, which will exclude volunteers out of your geographic area. But if this is required to best serve your clients and meet your mission, so be it.

In certain situations, you may need to ascertain whether or not the volunteer is under age 18. If so, then parental permission may be an issue, unless the volunteering is being done as a classroom assignment.

For more on these and other legalities, see Chapter 8.



***IMPORTANT NOTE*:**
At any point in this process, you can use the TELEPHONE!

Typing out answers can be more time-consuming than a productive oral conversation—and your personal preference may be voice communication. You can learn a great deal about an applicant on the telephone by his or her voice, tone, level of energy, and other behavior while speaking with you.

Self-Screening

The best type of screening is self-screening. Your goal should be that, after learning about your organization and your expectations, applicants can decide whether the available virtual volunteering assignments are for them—or not. Ideally, this will cut down on unrealistic expectations on the volunteer's part (remember that virtual volunteering is so new most people have never done it before) and limit frustrations on your part once the work begins.

Go over in detail how assignments will be made and how volunteers will be managed virtually (setting objectives, reporting requirements on the part of the volunteer, what staff support the volunteer can expect, etc.). Volunteers need to understand exactly what will be expected of them as part of this assignment, and that there are real objectives and deadlines associated with the job.

You might want to suggest that a prospective volunteer review the VV Project's two Tip Sheets:

A Self-Test: Are you Ready to Volunteer Virtually?

Tips on Volunteering Virtually

These appear at the end of this chapter (pages 42 and 45) and on the VV Project Web site. In addition, if the volunteer is likely to be asked to provide technical assistance, review the "Do's and Don'ts List" shown at the end of Chapter 8 (p. 84) and on the Web site.

Ask the person if she or he has any questions about the suggestions shared. This is a good way to make sure the volunteer understands the realities of virtual volunteering, as well as the unique climate of nonprofit and public sector organizations that involve volunteers.

Formal Orientation

You want all volunteers to understand your organization's mission, program focus, and value to the community, as well as how the work of volunteers benefits the organization's work. In addition to knowing your mission, volunteers also need to know about your agency's organizational culture, morals, and ethics, which are as important to the management of a project as its strategy and structure. This understanding puts the volunteers' contributions into context and motivates them to complete their assignments. Further, since online (and off-line) volunteers can be wonderful ambassadors on behalf of your organization, helping them to understand the mission and focus of the organization will give them more to say when promoting your organization to family and friends. A vital detail: Don't forget to give online volunteers your organization's postal/street address, daytime phone number, e-mail address and World Wide Web address.

We strongly suggest that your online orientation be done via e-mail rather than via your Web site; this is much more efficient for both you and the volunteer. It also gives you feedback as to whether or not the volunteer is reading and understanding what you send. However, feel free to direct the volunteer to certain pages on your Web site that contain information too long or detailed to include in an e-mail.

Online orientation ought to follow an agenda similar to what you would provide on-site volunteers and ought to be consistent for everyone, regardless of assignment. Be creative! For example, it might be fun to offer a “cyber tour” of your agency by posting a series of photographs on your Web site, walking the viewer through your facility. Be sure to capture yourself and other key contact people on film, too, since it is always nice to see a picture of someone you will usually meet only via keyboard. You can also involve experienced volunteers in welcoming new ones by encouraging e-mails that share tips and experiences from the volunteer perspective.

Online orientations should answer questions that the volunteer might have. For example, make sure the volunteer understands:

- that the volunteer is responsible for all equipment purchases and maintenance, and what, if any, support is provided by the agency regarding equipment and software use.
- your policy regarding volunteer expenses. For instance, your policy may be that all expenses must be approved by the volunteer's staff contact before they are actually incurred if the volunteer wants to be reimbursed.
- your other policies relating to volunteers, such as grounds for dismissal, chain of approval, confidentiality information, etc.
- whether or not the volunteer should create an e-mailbox specifically for communication with you.

If the volunteer is going to be working with your organization for more than just a few weeks on a virtual volunteering assignment, you need to communicate your agency's policies for volunteers *in writing*. It's a good idea to have volunteers sign an “Acknowledgement of Receipt” that says that they have reviewed certain information. In this acknowledgement, some agencies note that, by signing, recipients agree that they understand the information outlined, such as the agency's sexual harassment policy or rules of confidentiality.

Explain in the orientation that you require reports, participation in surveys, and mutual evaluation as part of the volunteer assignment. The success of a volunteer program cannot be determined without feedback from participants. Let the volunteers know that they will be surveyed at least once to get their feedback about their experience with your organization. Stress to them the importance of responding to this survey. Clarify if this information will remain confidential, and exactly who will have access to it.

The VV Project Web site offers sample online orientations by four different not-for-profit organizations. See http://www.serviceleader.org/vv/orient. These can help you create your own online orientation. Each is quite different, and there is a short introduction at the beginning of each sample that explains some of the differences.

Assess Skills and Interests

If a volunteer came to you largely because he or she is enthusiastic about your mission, then an assignment that directly helps your organization do its work better would probably be of most interest to the volunteer—gathering Web site addresses ("surf and gather") for similarly-focused organizations, for instance. But if a volunteer wants to work with your agency mostly because he or she wants to develop a skill, such as Web design abilities, that person may find a "surf and gather" assignment boring or unsatisfying. Just as with on-site volunteers, you will need to be flexible in matching agency needs with volunteer interests. For example, for this volunteer, you might structure an online research assignment that must be provided in .HTML format, which would give you the information you need in an easy-to-use format, and give the volunteer the .HTML experience desired.

A bigger issue is ascertaining whether a volunteer already has the level of skill necessary to do the work at hand. Self-assessment may not always be reliable. As already noted, you can ask for references or for examples of previous work. This is where an initial assignment is very important because it will let you evaluate the volunteer's ability and whether or not additional training is needed.

If the volunteer will be working directly with another member of the staff, include that person in the screening process. "Introduce" the applicant and the prospective supervisor/contact by e-mail and have them get-acquainted electronically. Share all the data you have collected with the staff member ahead of time so that the volunteer will not need to repeat anything already communicated. But allow the staffer to ask any questions relevant to the volunteer's knowledge or skills—whatever is necessary to make a decision about the competency of the applicant.

Agree on the Assignment

At some point in the process, you must definitively "accept" the applicant as a volunteer into an assignment, at least as a "volunteer-in-training." This should be done with some enthusiasm and words of welcome to mark the end of the "interviewing" and the start of initial preparation and work.

This is the volunteer program manager's last chance to clearly define the role this volunteer has accepted, and to make sure you both understand that role. It's more than just a name of an assignment and a deadline to complete it. This is where you add pertinent details to the volunteer position description, such as:

- How is this assignment in particular important to the organization?
- In what format should the work be turned in? (as an attachment? cut and pasted into an e-mail? uploaded via FTP?)
- May the volunteer contact organizations on behalf of your agency? If so, how should he or she represent his/her role with you?
- What forms of communication are needed for this assignment other than e-mail? a fax machine? voice mail?

Stress to the volunteer that there is nothing virtual about assignment deadlines or the organization's need for these assignments to be completed. Let the volunteer know how important this assignment is to the organization. Explain how his or her work is going to be used, or where the volunteer fits into the overall project. Giving volunteers the "big picture" and showing how their contributions are going to impact the organization are excellent motivational tools. This, in turn, can help prevent virtual no-shows on assignments.

Tell the volunteer when the natural stopping points are in assignments, when you both can look at what the volunteer has completed, re-evaluate the volunteer's expectations and availability, and decide how best to proceed. Don't automatically assume that volunteers are going to be around for several months, particularly if you have never worked with them before.

Training

As already discussed, we suggest new online volunteers start off with a simple assignment that can be completed in five hours or less, with a deadline of two weeks after the assignment is made. This gives the volunteer a sense of what volunteering with your organization is like, as well as what it's like to volunteer virtually, and it gives an indication of the volunteer's likely future performance.

The amount of training you need to do will depend on the demands of the assignment plus the skill level of the volunteer from the start. Also, training must be done by the person who will supervise the work, not necessarily the volunteer program manager. There will be different initial training needs to get the volunteer started, and then ongoing or "in-service" training to keep volunteers updated. Initial training cannot be standardized, except to remember that *good instructions* are as important as new skill learning. Perhaps the best tool you can give volunteers is a checklist of what needs to be done.

The unique and practical *Handbook for Online Volunteers* on the VV Web site (http://www.serviceleader.org/vv/handbook) was developed by VV Project volunteers themselves. It can be used as a self-training tool by volunteers at any agency wanting to learn everything from how to build a Web site to how to limit online research to newspapers only.

It is important to monitor initial assignments in a supportive way. Much of training is actually "coaching," offering suggested approaches as the work is being performed. So a good idea is to set up a schedule of "check-in" e-mails or even telephone calls as the volunteer is getting started. This will allow you to catch areas that need some correction, as well as to encourage the volunteer to keep on schedule with the work.

Cyberspace offers some exciting new ways to provide ongoing information to volunteers, particularly to update material and to keep everyone in a feedback loop. For example, you can:

- Post materials to special pages on your Web site, accessible only to volunteers.
- Provide audio or video tapes of volunteer meetings and workshops.
- Develop special e-mail lists and bulletin boards so that volunteers can communicate directly with each other to ask questions and share tips with volunteers in the same assignment.

If you post something important, you can e-mail an online "quiz" and require it to be completed after the volunteer has read the posting! There are all sorts of ways to make training interactive on the Web. In time to come, the technology will make it possible to connect off-site volunteers to on-site workshops by video and real-time chat rooms, too.

Note: The following two "Self-Test" and "Tip" sheets are designed as "handouts" for you to give to prospective online volunteers and as part of orientation, respectively.



A Self-Test:

Are you Ready to Volunteer Virtually?

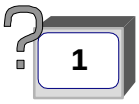


Volunteering from a home or work computer is different from working on-site with an organization for many obvious reasons: there's usually more flexibility in the use of the time you have; a greater degree of independence; you interact very little (if at all) with various staff members; etc. For some, these differences make virtual volunteering ideal; these same reasons can make it difficult for others.

Setting your own schedule is one of the chief joys of virtual volunteering. However, there's nothing virtual about the commitment you are making, nor the deadlines you are assigned to complete the volunteer work. The organization is counting on you to finish any projects you volunteer for. When you agree to a virtual volunteering assignment, you are agreeing to completing the assignment on time.

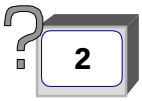
It's so easy to say yes to volunteering via the Internet that many individuals sign up to do so before really considering their expectations and schedule for an assignment.

Before you volunteer to help an organization via the Internet, consider the following to determine if you are ready:



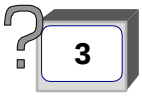
Do you have regular, ongoing access to the Internet?

If you only have access at college and the semester is about to end, or if you are about to switch Internet providers or computers, now is probably not a good time to volunteer to complete a project virtually. Online volunteering assignments usually last around three months; make sure you will have ongoing access to the Internet during that time.



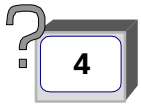
Do you know how to communicate well via the written word?

Most, if not all, of your communication during a virtual assignment will be via e-mail. Good writing skills and excellent attention to detail are important in any virtual volunteering project. Even if you want to provide a highly technical service, such as creating a database, you have to be able to communicate what you are doing to your contact at the organization.



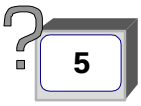
Do you stick to deadlines? Do you see a project through to its finish?

Organizations are counting on you to complete the assignment you've volunteered for; there's nothing virtual about your commitment.



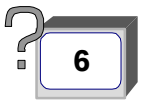
Are you comfortable working on your own, without direct supervision?

That doesn't mean you shouldn't ask for guidance when you need it. However, virtual assignments are best for those people who like working on their own.



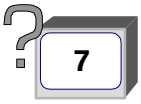
Are you self-motivated?

Some organizations involving remote volunteers are good at creating ways to inspire those individuals during their assignments—they may call you just to say, "good job" or to check in. The executive director may send out a personal e-mail thanking a volunteer for his or her contribution. But many organizations aren't this savvy with online volunteers yet. When you work at home, the inspiration to work on a virtual assignment has to come from yourself.



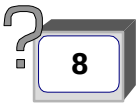
Do you pace yourself well? Do you avoid over committing for projects?

Most volunteers who do not complete their online assignments say that they thought they could do the work when they signed up but, as the deadline for the assignment approached, they realized that other things must take priority: school activities, home duties, work projects, etc. The organization is left with an unfinished assignment and an unmet need. Think about your work style and your other commitments before volunteering virtually.



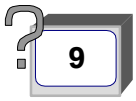
Do you have a set time of day when you will work on virtual assignments?

Don't just assume that you will get to that three-hour virtual assignment some time before the deadline two weeks from now. Schedule a time, however approximate, to complete the project you've committed to do.



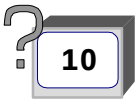
Will your work area be void of distractions while you are working on a volunteer assignment?

Any virtual assignments is going to take a certain level of concentration and intensity. Make sure your environment is going to allow you to devote the proper energies to your assignment.



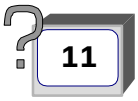
Is this the right time for you to take on a volunteering project?

If you are feeling overwhelmed by other responsibilities, now is probably not a good time to volunteer, on or off-line. Volunteer managers try to be very understanding about your job and family commitments—but they are also counting on you to finish assignments to which you commit.



Do you answer your e-mails quickly (no more than 48 hours/two business days after receipt)?

The organization may need to contact you with a critical issue before you complete the assignment. If you are interacting one-on-one with someone as part of the virtual assignment, responsiveness is crucial to the success of your online relationship.



What benefits do you expect out of volunteering virtually? What results should the organization expect because of your volunteering?

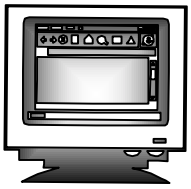
Answering these questions for yourself will help you better identify the virtual assignments right for you.

If you answered no to any of the above questions, or had difficulty answering some of the questions, perhaps you are not ready for volunteering virtually.

For more information about virtual volunteering, see http://www.serviceleader.org/vv.

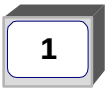


TIPS on Volunteering Virtually



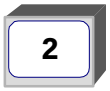
Volunteering via your home or work computer offers many advantages, no question. But it also brings with it special challenges, for both volunteers and the organizations that need them. For instance, more flexibility in your schedule is a plus, but the self-management and motivation it entails can make things difficult. Also, this is a cultural adjustment for many staff members—you are an unseen volunteer, and they may have trouble thinking of you as "real."

Based on feedback from various volunteers who have contributed time virtually, organizations that have involved such volunteers, and various telecommuting resources, we offer the following tips to help make your virtual assignment rewarding for everyone:



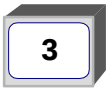
Make sure you are ready to volunteer virtually.

It's so easy to say yes to volunteering via the Internet that many individuals sign up to do so before really considering their expectations and schedule for an assignment. There's nothing virtual about the commitment you are making, nor the deadlines you are assigned to complete the volunteer work. The organization is counting on you to finish any projects you volunteer for. Before you volunteer to help an organization via the Internet, self-evaluate to determine if you are ready.



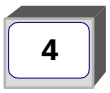
Discuss the job description and your expectations with your contact at the agency at the time the assignment is made.

You need to make sure you understand what it is you are committing to as a volunteer. This will cut down on frustration and disappointment for everyone involved!



Expect an acclimatization period.

It takes a while for even the most organized person to figure out how to manage time, space, communication systems and projects while working remotely. Even with all of this advice, expect to make adjustments, encounter conflicts, etc.



Define a schedule to complete the assignment.

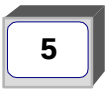
You'd be surprised how easy it is to commit to do an online research assignment that isn't due for three weeks and will only take a few hours to complete... and to then find yourself the day before it is due without having done anything! Don't count on the time to do an assignment to just happen. Set a specific time(s) to complete the assignment at the time the assignment is made.

How many hours will you work on this assignment each day and week? Which hours will you work? How many breaks will you take during your volunteer activity? You can limit your tendency to overwork or motivate yourself to work harder by deciding this up front.

Some people are most comfortable with systems and routines that would be very much like those they would use on-site at an agency. You could also try counting backwards from project deadlines, then making careful daily and weekly schedules for what you need to accomplish; work until you've finished meeting your goals for each day, then quit.

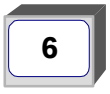
If you take on a long-term virtual volunteering assignment, periodically check your routine to see if it's working. Systems should make your life easier, not more complex. If you are not getting the results you want from your routine, revise it.

To be successful in a virtual volunteering assignment, be aware of your goals and target everything you do as a volunteer toward meeting them. Be flexible enough to recognize when something isn't working for you, and adjust it accordingly.



Pace yourself and learn when to say “when.”

It is easy to over commit via the Internet! If you've never volunteered virtually before, start with an assignment that will take only a few hours, to see how you like this kind of volunteering. You may have less time to offer than you think.



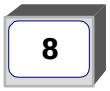
Set up a communications routine with the organization.

Report in at least once a week via e-mail on your volunteer activities for the organization, even if it's to report no activity. Review what you've accomplished, and what your immediate next activities will be. Ask questions! It doesn't have to be a large, involved report; just a short, friendly update will do.



Be kind to office support staff.

Remember that people that work at the agency your are supporting have many roles and are expected to do a lot with limited resources. While the volunteer manager or your key contact at the organization knows what you are doing, support staff may not be completely up-to-date on the project you are working on.



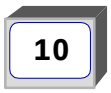
Follow the policies of the organization.

Every organization has policies on chain of approval, confidentiality of information, how you may represent yourself on behalf of the organization, etc. These policies are meant to be taken seriously! When in doubt, ask for guidance.



Avoid burnout.

At the office, routines structure your time. There's a routine for arriving at the office and getting settled into volunteering activities. When volunteering virtually, you may not know when to stop. This will lead to fatigue and burnout, and frustration for the organization if you've committed to a particularly large and very needed assignment. One way to get around overwork is to set firm starting and stopping times: develop a routine for volunteering virtually (see above). Taking breaks is another tip; severe headaches, eyestrain, neck and back pain are the result of working too many hours without a break.



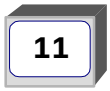
Motivation has to come from yourself.

At many organizations, there are posters and charts around the office that display the work and impact of the agency. When you are on-site, you come in contact with staff and clients. This all helps motivate on-site volunteers. But volunteers working virtually don't have these natural, informal inspirations around them, so they have to be much more self-motivated and self-driven.

Do a task when you are excited to do it—don't wait until later. For many volunteers, that comes when the assignment is made. Breaking the assignment into parts, and rewarding yourself with a break at the completion of each part, is another way to get through an assignment. Taking breaks will help you avoid burnout, as well as help you keep you motivated. Coffee breaks, exercise breaks, phone breaks, food, kid time, outdoor breaks, game breaks—you have a variety of ways to reward yourself!

If you find yourself having trouble completing an assignment because you just can't seem to get started on it, try re-reading the job description, and review the organization's Web site. Think about how your contribution is going to add to the worthwhile work of the organization. If you don't know, ASK.

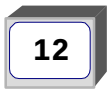
Remember positive reinforcement. Don't "guilt" yourself into working by putting yourself down or labeling everything, including yourself, in terms of success or failure.



Keep your workspace manageable and free of distractions.

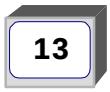
Set up your work space with all your equipment and materials within reach. Make sure others in your household understand and respect your commitment to volunteering virtually.

What interruptions will you allow? Define a policy in advance so you don't have to make individual decisions at each distraction. Define "I'm volunteering" rules to help family and friends avoid interrupting your volunteer time.



Review and follow the "Do's and Don'ts for Technical Assistance Volunteers."*

If you are volunteering a particular expertise to an organization, there are some things to keep in mind regarding your interactions with the organization and the way you present your information. This Tip Sheet can help.



Help the organization evaluate the program!

If you get a survey from the organization about your volunteer experience or future interests, take the time to respond to it. Your feedback will help the organization improve its program. Also, agencies rely on such feedback to help them meet the evaluation requirements for certain grants. Speak up if you have constructive criticism or a great idea. You've earned the right to give input.

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*Found in *The Virtual Volunteering Guidebook* on page 84 or online at http://www.serviceleader.org/vv, where you can find more information about virtual volunteering.



Chapter 5

Working with Online Volunteers

So now we have designed virtual volunteering assignments, recruited the best online volunteers, and prepared them to get started on their work. In this chapter, we'll consider how to adapt the various volunteer program management elements that assure successful involvement.

By the end of the orientation and training, the online volunteer should understand the organization, the value of volunteers to your agency, and the assignment: what is expected of him or her; clear objectives; and realistic deadlines. There are some volunteer assignments, such as working directly with clients, for which maintaining a schedule and following a process may be just as important as the end results. In such situations, a supervisor must monitor conduct as well as outcomes, perhaps including occasional face-to-face meetings. But for many virtual assignments, particularly when working with technical assistance volunteers, you can manage by results rather than by process. Avoid the elementary school teacher style of focusing on attendance and citizenship; instead use the model of college professors who focus on results. To put it another way, shift from a "steamroller" approach in which employees are told how to do work, to a "snowplow" approach in which the manager becomes the enabler of work. Rather than controlling the work being performed, approach supervision as a facilitator who provides help, assistance, and planning through electronic means.

Make sure that all staff treat online volunteers with the same respect and recognition as on-site volunteers (in the hope that such respect and recognition are already apparent). Train staff in how to interact with volunteers virtually—remember that this is new to almost everyone.

Set the Tone

Volunteers are responsible for meeting their deadlines, but the manager is also responsible for looking for new ways to inspire volunteers to achieve their goals. The traditional office environment includes external motivational and inspirational devices such as graphic displays of goals and achievements, memos and other messages, and the camaraderie of group interaction. Consequently, self-motivation might be considered a prerequisite to being an online volunteer! Regardless, it's the volunteer manager's job to make sure that online volunteers feel in touch and in tune with the organization.

Briefly, here are some key points to help make your virtual volunteering program successful for everyone involved:[1]

- Schedule regular meetings or reports, on- or off-line. All volunteers need to talk with you regularly to assess needs, give feedback and discuss problems. And you need to communicate advice on performance immediately. Most of your interactions with people who are volunteering virtually can be done by e-mail, but consider setting up occasional "live" meetings, either by phone or on site, to help the volunteer feel less isolated and more a part of the team.

- Keep off-site volunteers informed of team, project, and organization information. This is crucial to help them feel included. Make sure that all pertinent office memos are regularly distributed via e-mail to remote volunteers. Be sure volunteers receive any electronic newsletters you send to supporters highlighting program activities and accomplishments. As well, online volunteers should receive the same invitations, information and "thank you's" sent to on-site volunteers, either via e-mail or postal mail.

- Honesty is the best policy: be open with volunteers about problems and challenges. If something isn't working out during an assignment, for whatever reason, talk to the volunteer about it, either via phone or via e-mail. Even electronically, people can get a sense of something amiss with someone else. Treat the volunteer with the honesty you would want as a volunteer yourself.

- Be patient, be supportive, and remember that not every volunteer job is right for every volunteer. The better your screening, orientation and supervising process, the less chance there is for misunderstandings or incomplete assignments. Remember that it is easier to start small and increase assignments than to start big and risk overwhelming a volunteer.

- Give clear directions to volunteers on how to find important information and resources as part of their assignment. For instance, is there a special database that has information that applies to your organization, but can be difficult to find via commonly-used online search engines? Are there particular online publications that might be difficult to find as well by someone not already familiar with them?

- Take the pulse of volunteers on a regular basis to trouble shoot. Require volunteer participation in surveys and other forms of evaluation.

- Fine-tune your style and technique as necessary. Slight adjustments in styles and approaches to virtual volunteer management may need to be made to improve success. Commit to being responsive to feedback from both volunteers and relevant staff members, and be flexible enough to make changes when and where necessary.

- Allow volunteers to withdraw from the program. Just as you need to be prepared to expand the virtual volunteering program, you also need to be aware that volunteers will withdraw from the program, either to

move on to other volunteer opportunities within or outside of your organization, or to take a break from volunteering altogether. It is imperative that you get feedback from volunteers to be clear on their reasons for withdrawing; if it's because of problems with your virtual volunteering program, you will need to know so you can make necessary adjustments in the program.

- Celebrate the successes. Acknowledge benchmark accomplishments as they occur, without waiting for the final product.

Stay in Touch

Regular online reporting is one way to connect with remote volunteers, to make up for seldom or never seeing each other face-to-face. Provide clear and concise guidelines to volunteers concerning the expected frequency of communications, what types of communications are expected when (such as a list of actions completed weekly, monthly, or quarterly), and the desired format and content. Reply to these progress reports as soon as possible to acknowledge receipt. If the volunteer doesn't report in as agreed, e-mail him or her to check on progress.

If you feel you must meet all volunteers in person (and have good reasons for doing so), then by all means require face-to-face training, supervision sessions, and other on-site interaction. Of course, this will limit your potential pool of volunteers to those living in geographic proximity, but if your comfort level demands this, it’s o.k.

Don’t forget the telephone! Even though you will communicate most of the time by e-mail, an occasional phone call has many benefits. Perhaps most important, you and the volunteer can hear the tone and emphasis of your voices, giving many clues as to how you both feel about lots of things. This emotional sense will make your e-mail messages more meaningful, because you will be able to “hear” the words as they are meant, rather than as they read. The telephone also allows you to discuss issues in more depth than brief e-mails ever can.

Finally, become skilled at using e-mail effectively. Send brief messages and be clear about what action, if any, is needed and by when. Use the message bar to your advantage. When people receive a ton of e-mail, they scroll down their mailbox and use the message bars to prioritize what they will read. Develop a standard message bar vocabulary and encourage everyone to get into the habit of using it. For example:

- Decide on an acronym for your organization and use it consistently as the first thing to appear on the message bar. So, the Department of Human Services might become: DHS.

- For general information e-mails, the message bar might say:

  DHS INFO: <subject><date>

- If you need a response quickly, you might say:

  DHS: RESPONSE NEEDED!

- If this is information requested by the volunteer individually, say:

  DHS: Your information as requested.

This will also allow volunteers to save important e-mails in computer files matching the message bars—which means that everyone will be storing them in the same way. For committees or boards of directors using e-mail communication, this can be a very useful way to systemize files.

Of course, you can quickly become inundated with too many e-mails. One idea is to create a separate mailbox specifically for interchange with volunteers. This will free your main mailbox for other messages and will allow you to set aside time to focus on all the volunteer-related messages in the other box. It also leads to another volunteer assignment: e-mail reviewer! By segregating volunteer e-mails, you can train an interested volunteer to read them, deal with standard inquiries without your involvement, and alert you to items needing your attention. Again, this could be done virtually.

A Few More Supervision Suggestions

Depending on the nature of the work to be done, you can try some of the following techniques to support volunteers:

- Develop a buddy system, pairing experienced volunteers with new ones, or having two or three online volunteers work as a team. This encourages helpful interaction without necessarily involving the staff supervisor. Volunteers may be less hesitant to ask questions of their peers, too.

- Create an electronic report form with consistent, key questions. Train volunteers to expect an e-mail with this form on, say, a bi-weekly basis. Follow up if you do not receive a response within 48 hours. Rather than seeming like nagging, this shows the volunteer that you are paying attention and that progress on this assignment is important.

- Ask online volunteers to include a few sentences about “what my next steps will be” whenever they send you a report or an interim work product.

- The tips on using e-mail effectively work in reverse, too. Teach volunteers to alert you in the message bar of e-mails when they need *you* to respond in order to move work forward.

- Recruit team leaders to support a group of online volunteers, or rotate this position among several volunteers in the same assignment.

Dealing with Problems

As with any on-site volunteer or employee, it is inevitable that an occasional problem will surface in a virtual volunteering assignment. Diagnose what the problem actually is. Is the volunteer unable to perform the work well because:

- s/he needs more training, better instructions, or additional tools?
- the agency liaison has not been communicating regularly?
- something has occurred in the volunteer's life that makes accomplishing the work harder than originally anticipated?
- s/he does not have the self-discipline to do the work as committed?

Obviously, your diagnosis will determine your course of action. As already noted, honesty is the best policy. Share concerns openly. Telephone if necessary. No matter what you do—do something. If you do not act when a volunteer (online or off) is performing poorly, you send the message that it doesn't matter, and that's not true. Better to have a short-though-uncomfortable interaction with a volunteer to either improve productivity or make a re-assignment than to jeopardize agency services.

In all cases, the more ongoing your communication with online volunteers, the quicker you will be to identify potential problems and, ideally, prevent them in the first place. Remember that no one volunteers to do a bad job! Whether virtually or on-site, people give their time to be of real service. If they are not doing something well, don't waste their time by letting the mistakes continue. Be respectful of their voluntary contribution and help them to do the best possible job.

Coordination

Scheduling and monitoring virtual activities will require the same time and attention as with any other volunteer project, though your systems may have to adapt to cyberspace. Computers are extremely helpful in that you can develop standardized form e-mails and templates, storing them on disk for instant access. If you maintain a database of the e-mail address of volunteers, searchable by variables such as current assignment, you can generate regular e-mailings to double-check who is active in a given period, schedule work, and solicit feedback. The key is to track responses. If you send out e-mails and never follow up with those who do not answer your questions, word will soon get out that you are not serious about monitoring the program. Speak to your agency's Webmaster or Internet Service Provider and see if you can create automatic response devices that acknowledge receipt of e-mail and generate reports to you.

Employee/Volunteer Relationships

In the real world, tension between employees and volunteers is a universal subject of discussion. All the factors that lead to misunderstandings operate in cyberspace, some with even more intensity. For example, supervisors must be accessible to all volunteers. With virtual volunteering, this means prompt e-mail responses. This can evoke irritation if a volunteer has unreasonable expectations of speed. And vice versa.

Virtual relationships require the ability to “read” one another without any visual or audio cues. E-mail can often be misinterpreted in terms of tone or intent. See the section in Chapter 8 on “Netiquette.”

For many agencies, this is the toughest part of introducing virtual volunteering to an organization—overcoming staff fears and getting buy-in for the concept. Start by talking with appropriate staff members and volunteers about the potential for virtual volunteering at your organization, and why different staff members and volunteers want, or don't want, to do this. The VV Project has heard from a lot of people who would love to try virtual volunteering at their own organizations, but who feel that the other staff or volunteers aren't "ready" or are uneasy about the whole idea of virtual volunteering. This feeling of "unreadiness" can come from a variety of perceptions and here are some suggestions for how to deal with them:

- *Staff members are still getting used to the idea of the Internet as a concept, let alone as a tool. And now you're talking about involving "unseen" volunteers?*

  Help employees to see that these are *not* "virtual volunteers”—they are just as real as on-site volunteers! For some managers, there is no substitute for personal discussion and, in such cases, these managers may be able to manage virtual volunteering only with individuals who do occasionally make on-site visits.

- *Staff feels volunteer management is already time-consuming and that adding a virtual component will make it more so.*

  The VV Project stresses again and again that virtual volunteering is successful only in those organizations that already engage volunteers successfully in traditional, face-to-face settings. If this is not the case with your agency, it's probably not ready for virtual volunteering. However, if your organization is successful and effective in its volunteer endeavors, creating virtual components of these endeavors should not be a substantial burden. The key to getting buy-in in this situation is starting small, with a virtual volunteering pilot project (See Chapter 7).

- *Staff fears that you are trying to replace on-site volunteering with virtual volunteering.*

  Virtual volunteering should not be looked at as a replacement for face-to-face volunteering; instead, it is an expansion of your volunteer resources, an augmentation of your organization's activities, and

another way for someone to help support your organization and give back to the community. For some people, it will be a preferred avenue of volunteering, but for many people, it will be an additional avenue of volunteering.

- *Those in charge of technology use at your organization claim that your organization doesn't have the computer or Internet capacity to involve volunteers virtually.*

  If your organization has access to the Internet, you have the capacity to involve volunteers virtually, period. Virtual volunteering has little to do with technology and everything to do with people. Virtual volunteering does not increase Internet costs for your organization, if your organization already has access to the Internet. The Internet affords a volunteer manager many critical resources, in addition to a new way to find and involve volunteers.

- *Staff is unwilling to be one of the first organizations involving volunteers virtually.*

  Numerous organizations already engaged in some form of virtual volunteering. Becoming familiar with them can help staff see that this is a new idea, but not an untried idea.

- *Unfamiliarity with the details and practicalities of virtual volunteering can be coupled with some unwillingness to learn more about these matters until staff is certain you'll be able to do it.*

  Again, the key to getting buy-in in this situation is lots of staff education about virtual volunteering, being an advocate for this program, involving online volunteers yourself, and starting small in introducing the program with a virtual volunteering pilot project.

Strategies to Gain Staff Acceptance

Your target should be those employees who already work with volunteers in some capacity, as well as those volunteers who have a long-term relationship with your organization and work with other volunteers. Because at this point you already have systems in place such as gathering e-mail addresses from potential volunteers, you can demonstrate that the organization would be building on information it already has to institute such a program.

Prepare a written plan. Develop a mission statement, goals and objectives for your virtual volunteering program, and the introduction of a pilot project. Inventory resources, barriers, expectations, champions, etc. for such an endeavor. Identify the potential costs and fears voiced by staff members in your meetings with them about virtual volunteering and outline ways to allay those fears. Establish a timeline but show that you are flexible in dealing with the unexpected. Identify activities and assign responsible parties to complete them.

Establish executive-level support and commitment. Without support from your organization's leadership, a virtual volunteering program can be doomed to failure. Executive level commitment and ongoing support can help break down managers' reluctance to virtual volunteering and get such managers to participate long enough to see the positive results. If you've addressed the program's potential and addressed staff concerns, obtaining support should not be difficult.

Review the online resource "Introducing New Technology Successfully into an Agency" at: http://www.coyotecom.com/database/techbuy.html. This document will provide you with suggestions for dealing with staff reluctance and stress around technology issues.

Provide training on virtual volunteering techniques to show that it's not vastly different from managing people on-site. Address the unique elements of working with online volunteers and de-mystify them.

Recordkeeping and Reporting

Managers of remote volunteers may feel an even stronger need to maintain frequent and ongoing communications with online volunteers, to make up for seldom or never seeing each other face-to-face. As discussed in the section on Supervision, provide guidelines about the expected frequency of communications, what types of reports are expected and when, and the desired format and content.

The Virtual Volunteering Project requires its own online volunteers to report in via e-mail on each Friday or Monday. Each volunteer reports:

- the number of hours worked (even if it's none);
- what percentage of the assignment is left to do (is it half done? 75% done?) and how "on track" the volunteer feels;
- what tools and resources are proving most valuable in completion of this assignment;
- any problems/obstacles the volunteer has encountered in completing this assignment.

It is important to reply to these progress reports as soon as possible to acknowledge receipt. If the volunteer doesn't report in, be proactive—write him or her to check in on progress. Without such ongoing communications, your volunteers will feel out of the loop and unsupported. Actually, you will too!

You can also use Web-based forms for volunteers to report progress (samples can be found through the VV Web site). Such ongoing communication has the added benefit of providing an automatic written record of volunteer activities and progress. Develop a procedure to track reported data, keep it accessible in a centralized location on disk or on paper (a spreadsheet, a folder, a directory, etc.), and review this information

regularly! You will then be able to communicate what online volunteers have contributed to date, including the hours they have logged. Your goal is to show the impact of virtual volunteering at your organization.

Recordkeeping means nothing if you don't generate reports. You will want to keep your organization's executives informed about virtual volunteering activities but you also can use reports as a way to motivate both the volunteers and the staff with whom they work. Make everyone a part of the bigger picture.

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1 Segments of this section were adapted from *What We Learned (the Hard Way) about Supervising Volunteers* by Jarene Frances Lee with Julia M. Catagnus, Energize, Inc., 1999; http://www.energizeinc.com.



Chapter 6

Evaluating and Recognizing Online Service

The eleventh element of successful volunteer program management is "Program Evaluation and Performance Assessment." But you cannot evaluate accomplishments at the end of a period if you do not set goals for what you want to accomplish from the start. So the first step in evaluating virtual volunteering is having clear and reasonable goals that you have communicated to everyone involved. These goals should not be limited to "activities," such as "how many" of something occurred; instead, focus on "outcomes" that demonstrate the impact of the work contributed. Of course, the more product-oriented a virtual volunteering assignment, the easier it will be to measure its quality.

Secondly, you cannot conduct an evaluation without some record of what was done and how. This is one of the major reasons for creating an effective reporting system as described in the previous chapter. Once you know what you will be assessing at the end of a time period, gather data over time that will allow you to examine the facts.

As with all evaluation, there will be questions about the overall virtual volunteering project and its management, as well as the need to assess the performance of individual online volunteers. Whatever processes you use to evaluate volunteering on-site can be adapted to cyberspace. Even a "focus group" can be formed by an e-mail going to several volunteers, staff, or clients simultaneously.

Survey Volunteers to Evaluate their Experience with Your Agency

Be sure volunteers are told during their initial orientation that they will be asked to complete a survey about their experience with your organization following the completion of their assignment. You can use all or part of the following survey to gather feedback from volunteers who have been involved with your organization virtually. These questions are designed to help you see the strengths and weaknesses in your management of volunteers who work off-site via their home and work computers.

Send this survey via e-mail, with an introduction that notes why you are asking for this information ("to help us improve our interactions with and management of volunteers," for instance), and what you are going to do with feedback (will it be available for all staff members? will it be published in any reports?). You may want to put in an assurance such as this:

> *I would greatly appreciate your honest feedback, and hope you will be candid—while I may pass on comments to others at our agency, I will not identify the volunteers who said them, if you request such anonymity.*

Not all volunteers will respond. But for those who do, study their feedback carefully. Does their description of what they did for your organization match the description from your point of view? Do they have a positive image of your organization as a result of their volunteer experience with you?

Survey questions you might include are:

- What type of volunteer services did you provide for our organization?
- Who was your primary contact at our organization during this/these assignment/s? Was s/he helpful? accessible?
- What staff members did you work with during this/these assignment/s? Were they helpful? accessible?
- Did you work with other volunteers during this/these assignment/s? How? Was such collaboration successful?
- How much of your volunteer experience with us was "virtual" (working via your home or work computer) and how much of it was spent on-site at our organization?
- How many hours would you say you have spent as a volunteer for our organization to date?
- Do you feel you completed your assignment? If not, why?
- How long have you volunteered/did you volunteer with our organization, on or off-line?
- What type of support did you expect from our organization? Did the support you actually received meet your expectations? Please provide details.
- What did you like about volunteering via the Internet, as opposed to volunteering in-person/face-to-face?
- What did you dislike about volunteering via the Internet?
- How did our organization recognize/reward you for your volunteer contribution? Did you like this?
- What would make your virtual volunteering experiences with our organization more satisfying to you?
- What types of virtual volunteering opportunities do you wish were available that you haven't yet encountered?
- What are your impressions of our organization and our programs?
- Would you volunteer with us again? Why or why not?
- Other comments/suggestions.

Be sure to thank respondents for their feedback!

Survey Staff to Evaluate their Experience with Virtual Volunteering

You can use all or part of the following survey to gather feedback from staff who have worked with volunteers providing service virtually. These questions are designed to help you see the strengths and weaknesses in your management of and communications with volunteers who work off-site via their home and work computers. Even though staff you are surveying are probably on site, you might still want to send this survey via e-mail, since then you won't have to re-type the information into a document later (you can just cut and paste). Include an introduction that notes why you are asking for this information ("to help us improve our interactions with and management of volunteers"), and what you are going to do with the feedback (will it be available for all staff members? will it be published in any reports?).

Study the responses you receive carefully. Is staff comfortable working with volunteers virtually? Are there gaps in communication with volunteers working remotely? How do the staff responses match the volunteer responses re: what the volunteer accomplished?

Possible questions to pose are:

- What type of services/support did volunteers provide you virtually?
- How many volunteers did you work with during this/these virtual assignment/s? Were these volunteers appropriately matched to their assignments?
- How much of your work with these volunteers was "virtual" (working via home or work computers) and how much of it was spent on-site at our organization or by phone?
- How many hours of service have volunteers working virtually provided?
- What skills/contributions did you find most valuable in volunteers who provided services virtually?
- Did such volunteers complete assignments? If not, why?
- What did you expect out of these volunteers' virtual service to you and to our organization?
- Did the volunteers' online work meet your expectations? Please provide details.
- What did you like about working with volunteers virtually via the Internet, as opposed to in-person / face-to-face interactions?
- What did you dislike about working with volunteers virtually via the Internet?
- How did you recognize/reward online volunteers for their services?

- What would make virtual volunteering experiences more satisfying to you as a supervisor?
- What types of virtual volunteering opportunities would you like to assign in the future?
- Do you think these volunteers will work with our organization again? Why or why not?
- Other comments/suggestions:

Again, be sure to thank respondents for their feedback!

Individual Performance Assessment

Much of the information you will gain from the questions above will allow you to evaluate the overall virtual volunteering program. Some of the responses, however, will reflect how successfully (or not) individual volunteers performed in their assignments. Organizations have the right to assess the performance of volunteers just as they should evaluate employees. In fact, it may be even more important! If you tolerate volunteering that does not accomplish useful results, the organization is allowing the volunteer's time to be wasted. As we said in the last chapter under "Dealing with Problems," no one volunteers with the purpose of doing poor work. Quite the opposite. Volunteers—online and off—want to know that they are really helping.

Engage online volunteers in a self-assessment process. Ask them what they feel they accomplished and what they would improve if they did it again. Encourage whoever worked most closely with each volunteer to share his/her honest opinion of the work performed. The goal of this exchange is never to be punitive. It is a feedback cycle that, ideally, will motivate volunteers to learn new skills, experiment with new ways of doing things, and be even more successful in the future. And, on the assumption that often the feedback will be very positive anyway, the process becomes part of your recognition plan, too.

Recognition

Recognition is much more than saying thank you—although it is always appropriate to express appreciation for any contribution. Informal recognition that occurs as work is performed is usually more motivating to individuals than formal, annual "events" designed to thank all volunteers. Sometimes recognition is as easy as giving visible credit to the volunteer who completed the task. Perhaps the most powerful form of recognition is listening to and then using a volunteer's suggestions.

In real-world settings, expressions of appreciation occur naturally, when volunteers come in contact with staff members during coffee breaks, talk with board members and other volunteers at special events, see first

hand how their contributions are used on-site at the organization, etc. How can you make up for this lack of in-person contact with remote volunteers who interact with your agency only via the Internet? Further, how can you use the Internet to acknowledge the contributions of all volunteers, including those who work on-site at your agency?

The VV Project has developed the following on- and off-line recognition suggestions:

1. *Be timely.*

The most effective form of thanks follows the completion of a significant part of an assignment. Don't wait until the project is completely over or until National Volunteer Week in April to say thank you. Find ways to immediately acknowledge a job well done and a service successfully provided. This can be as simple as an e-mail that says "thanks" and outlines how the volunteer's contributions are going to be used by the agency or the impact this work may have on clients.

2. *Everyone should be appreciated.*

It takes many small contributions of service—not just the big ones—to keep a program moving forward and meeting its objectives. Be grateful for the work of everyone involved, not just the contributions of the superstars.

3. *Recognition is everyone's job.*

The volunteer program manager is often not the person working with volunteers once they take on an assignment, even virtual assignments. Other staff members usually supervise and interact with volunteers once the work gets going. Educate staff in the importance of volunteer recognition and how to provide it on an ongoing basis, and survey volunteers on occasion to make sure they are feeling involved and appreciated.

4. *Inclusion is key.*

Most online volunteers who have communicated with the VV Project cite inclusion as the way they most appreciate being recognized. They have said the best form of thanks is seeing and hearing what difference their work really makes.

Add online volunteers to your off-line and online mailing lists, copy them on staff memos (as appropriate) relating to programs and services in which they might be interested, invite them to special events, staff trainings and celebrations (if geographically possible), invite their comments about programs and services, ask them about the volunteer program and how it's working for them, etc. These methods show volunteers how their work contributes to your organization's mission, and demonstrates that you value them as part of your team.

Some online volunteers may occasionally be in your area on a business trip, visiting family or friends, or en route to another destination. Extend an open invitation to off-site volunteers to visit your agency if they come to your city.

5. *Be consistent.*

If your on-site volunteers receive a lapel pin to honor them for the hours they donate to your organization, why not your online volunteers? If you acknowledge online volunteers by name on your Web site, why not your face-to-face volunteers?

Terry Hiner at SmartGrrls notes:

> *We did a volunteer recognition page for our Web site at year end and linked to it from our e-mail newsletter. We always feature "virtual volunteers" alongside local volunteers in the newsletter. I have sent off bumper stickers to [volunteers in] Canada and Florida. Sometimes I enclose a picture of some of our program activities so that they can see what they are really part of. I've even had students in our programs write thank you notes to virtual volunteers.*

6. *Be creative.*

Use the capability of the Internet. Have some fun! Send one of the many electronic greeting cards and awards available for free. Add some audio, too.

Do you have volunteers who are too remote geographically to attend a volunteer recognition event or other special event where volunteers will be present? What about setting up a computer terminal with Internet access at the event and having a live chat, so that attendees can communicate with online volunteers? What about setting up a digital camera so that volunteers who can't attend in person can do so via cyberspace? Finding a corporation to donate its resources to make such novel ideas happen isn't as difficult as you might think!

At a minimum, ask online volunteers to send you a photograph of themselves and post these photos on a special board at the on-site volunteer recognition event. Then photograph some people looking at the board and post THAT to the Web site!

7. *Use your Web site.*

List all volunteers and their contributions on your Web site. Also cite them on individual Web pages, either those with which they helped or those that talk about a project with which they have been involved. Include pictures of the volunteers in action! Some good examples of online "Thank You" pages can be found on the VV Project Affiliate sites.

8. *Highlight volunteer activities in an online newsletter.*

Volunteer involvement is a program highlight! If you have a printed or electronic newsletter or update that is sent out to donors, clients and others interested or involved with your agency, be sure to highlight the contributions of on-site and online volunteers at your agency. In addition to listing volunteers who have helped, talk about the impact particular volunteer services have and the difference they make.

9. *Develop an online "badge."*

LibertyNet, one of the VV Project's Affiliate organizations, came up with the idea of honoring volunteers with a logo they could place on their personal Web sites or include in their signature file on e-mails and news-group postings. We loved this idea, and invited our volunteers to submit design suggestions for our own VV Project logo. Now, volunteers who complete online assignments for the Project may display this badge on their Web sites, and create a link from the logo back to our own Web site:



10. *Ask for input.*

Asking volunteers for input is a form of recognition. It says: "We value your opinion." So be sure to include online volunteers when looking for suggestions about improving or expanding your program. You certainly should do this if the project under consideration is in the volunteer's area of expertise, but give people a chance to comment on other topics, too. This stretches their imagination and shows that they are a part of an organization larger than their one assignment.

Many publications and articles over the years have offered recognition ideas. You can find lists of such ideas, plus more advice on recognizing volunteers on the http://www.serviceleader.org and http://www.energizeinc.com Web sites.

Input from Volunteers

We have just discussed the importance of using a volunteer's ideas as an aspect of recognition. For the organization, volunteers offer a talent pool of skills and backgrounds quite different from that of the paid staff. You can waste the potential of this knowledge base if you do not access it. Online volunteers can be especially useful because they cannot develop fixed opinions about the work of your agency; almost by definition, they are outside normal observation processes. They are closer to the "general public" in reacting to your questions, yet have demonstrated loyalty to you.

Consciously develop channels for input by all volunteers, including those in virtual assignments. The ongoing communication systems and evaluation surveys already suggested are part of your feedback process. Other suggestions are:

- Select volunteers to receive drafts of materials before they are submitted to the press, to donors, or to the public. Ask them to comment, perhaps responding to specific questions about the material.
- Circulate a "question of the month" by e-mail and ask for comments.
- Ask online volunteers to do some Web research to see if the work of your organization is mentioned anywhere. How? Is it accurate?
- Whenever a virtual assignment is completed, be sure to ask the volunteer for his or her assessment of how it went and how the process might be improved the next time around.

It may seem strange to say, but you may need to teach volunteers how to express criticism, especially via e-mail. Nasty or sarcastic comments may be quick to type but not well received. On the other hand, specific comments accompanied by alternative suggestions are seen more favorably. And, encourage volunteers to speak up when they see something *good*, too! Recognition is a two-way street.



Chapter 7

Implementing a Virtual Volunteering Pilot Program

We can't emphasize this enough: our information on virtual volunteering is geared to organizations who already understand how to work with volunteers effectively in traditional, face-to-face settings. Basic knowledge of and experience working with volunteers greatly increases your chances of being able to successfully involve volunteers virtually. Once your organization is ready for virtual volunteering and you've set the internal groundwork, you are ready to look into implementation of a virtual volunteering program.

We suggest you start small, with a virtual volunteering pilot project. One way to begin is to create an online *component* of a phone or face-to-face support group. You already have these volunteers, you already screen them and manage them. Providing an online way for them to communicate, in addition to their phone or face-to-face communications, allows you to institute virtual volunteering by simply letting the volunteers exchange e-mail addresses or participate in an online chat room.

However, it's imperative that the staff person in charge of this program support the idea. Add information to the regular evaluation of this program to find out how many participants use this e-mail option.

Finding the Pioneers

To try virtual technical assistance volunteering, start by looking around:

- Who on staff already involves volunteers in their work?
- Who on staff has regular access to the Internet and feels the most at ease communicating via e-mail and surfing the Web?
- Who on staff is in need of research (such as statistics in support of a program or research for potential grants)?
- Who on staff can identify assignments that could be completed mostly off-site by a volunteer, such as designing a brochure or Web pages?

These staff members are good candidates to work with volunteers virtually. Further:

- Which volunteers are already engaged in projects they might be able to do from home or work computers, such as research or designing a publication?

- How "wired" are these volunteers (do they have regular e-mail/Internet access)?
- Would they be enthusiastic about doing some of their volunteer services in a virtual setting?

These might become your pioneer online volunteers.

Implementation of a virtual volunteering program is a step-by-step process. It may not be necessary to follow all the steps outlined here, and the order of the steps at your organization may vary. But we have used a variety of resources and first-hand experiences to show exactly what implementing such a program can entail.

Before you get started, prepare a written plan for the pilot, with initial goals and objectives. Inventory resources, barriers, expectations, champions, etc. Identify the potential costs and fears voiced by staff members in your meetings with them about virtual volunteering and outline ways to allay those fears. Identify the staff that will participate in the pilot program. Also in this written plan, define the criteria for measuring progress and, ultimately, the success of the program. Whatever size your organization is, design a plan which allows flexibility and freedom for individual customization.

Practice what you preach by recruiting at least one online volunteer assigned to *you*. Then learn from your first-hand experience in working with this volunteer. Give staff the support and training they need to get started. Don't force virtual volunteering on anyone. Participation by staff or volunteers should be voluntary. Explaining the benefits carefully to prospective online volunteers and managers enables them to make an educated choice.

Fine-tuning the Pilot Program

First, develop a system for ongoing feedback. Take the pulse of volunteers, managers, and co-workers on a regular basis to trouble shoot. Be flexible enough to make changes when and where necessary.

Provide status reports to everyone involved. Identify milestones and benchmarks for the program and monitor both general progress and individual participation. Consider forming an ad hoc advisory committee to help you think through your plans and assess the results.

It is critical for everyone participating in the pilot program to share in its evaluation. Collectively, you want to be able to answer these questions:

- What did the services of volunteers working virtually contribute to our organization?
- What did volunteers free staff to do? What did the volunteers allow the organization to accomplish?

- In which virtual volunteering assignments did we have the most turnover and why?
- Which assignments are the most popular with volunteers and why?
- Were all virtual assignments filled by someone? How effective are our recruitment methods for virtual assignments?
- Did virtual volunteering allow us to involve more volunteers? Did it allow us to tap into new demographics?
- Is working with virtual volunteering giving staff a chance to develop new supervisory skills without adding significant management burdens?

Review the results with everyone at your organization who works with volunteers. This will be your chance to look for ways to adjust or expand your virtual volunteering program before you make it organization-wide. Once you determine the effectiveness of your pilot program, and address concerns and obstacles to its success, you can explore continuing the program, or expanding the program into new areas.



The Virtual Volunteering Guidebook

Part III

Making the Most of Online Service

The Virtual Volunteering Project
http://www.serviceleader.org/vv/
part of the Charles A. Dana Center, University of Texas at Austin

Energize INC.
...especially for leaders of volunteers
http://www.energizeinc.com

ImpactOnline
http://www.impactonline.org



Chapter 8

Special Issues Online

Online Culture and Netiquette

Most of your communications with online volunteers will be done via e-mail. Learning to communicate in text-only can be a challenge for some people, volunteers and managers alike. Sometimes, you have to interpret people's communication and assist them to be clear and effective online. You will experience a wide variety of communicators as you work with online volunteers:

- Some write e-mails exactly as they talk, using punctuation and "smileys" to show emotion or expression.
- Some write formally.
- Some write short and to the point.
- Some write often.
- Some interpret silence as approval, others as disapproval.
- Some e-mail you and then call, as they aren't absolutely certain of technology and need the approving voice.
- Some write e-mails littered with punctuation, spelling and sentence structure errors, but are very articulate on the telephone.
- Some are not completely aware of all of the functions of their e-mail software (setting line length, type size, having a signature, setting the default to reply to the sender rather than everyone, etc.).
- Some are "documentors" and some "snippers." The former feel it is necessary to repeat the full text even if it is the sixth message passed. The latter like to respond in a concise manner, deleting so much of previous messages that it can be hard to figure out to what they are responding or referring.

As is noted in *Working Together Online*, an excellent publication by Maureen James and Liz Rykert, in association with Web Networks (www.Web.net): "Drawing out the human tone and feelings from online text can be tricky." Even silence can be misinterpreted. "One reason that

silence occurs is that the person posting the message hasn't been clear about what kind of response they are looking for." *Working Together Online* offers what the Virtual Volunteering Project feels is some of the best advice regarding communicating with volunteers online: "Never make assumptions about what you are reading. Learn to move slowly in what feels like a very fast medium."

One person who involves volunteers virtually told Jayne: "A few times I 'e-talked' with people for years as if they were undergrads, then found out they were department heads!!!" The same has been true in reverse. Jayne corresponded with an online volunteer for several weeks as if that person was a working professional, because of the tone of the person's e-mails and the quality of work. Later, she realized, upon reviewing the original volunteer application, that the person was actually 14 or 15 years old!

Written online exchanges can't tell us everything about a person, and can even be unintentionally misleading. Also, working with volunteers online, even those you have met face-to-face at some point, means you are unable to visually read a person's face or hear voice "cues" about how they are feeling, their enthusiasm (or lack thereof), etc. Brenda Ruth of the Boulder Community Network, a VV Project Affiliate, has a lot of experience working with online volunteers and says:

> *There are very distinct personalities behind the words and it is easy to get in the mode of seeing e-mail as a long to-do list, rather than human interaction.*
>
> *E-mail opens up lots of opportunities for people who aren't comfortable in face-to-face communication. I find that people are OK about saying "no," moreso than if I called or was there in person. Falling back on my communication studies in college, this makes sense because so many "yes" answers are prompted by how the request was made in voice tone, physical proximity and inclusion of touch.*
>
> *The most successful projects are when I have declared what I expect and when, and the volunteer can agree to it, or not and turn it down, or modify.*
>
> *There is also the documentation factor that is available on e-mail and not in physical contact. Knowing that people can relook at what is said, or save what was said, I think changes interaction online. One can't fall back on the classic, "I called and left several messages last week…." You have proof that you did or did not send or receive them. For me personally, I will double check facts before I write something I am only a little bit familiar with. Whereas in speaking I wouldn't hesitate to make an educated guess.*

Penny Leisch of the Arizona Pioneers' Home Volunteers Association (also a VV Project affiliate), offers this advice for communicating with volunteers via e-mail:

People interpret written words based on their experiences, culture and education. Some people are very literal, good readers and very good listeners. Other people need the same information repeated several times before they assimilate everything. These people need to be led through tasks step-by-step.

Online volunteers may come from a variety of cultures and my everyday terms can mean something totally different to them. For instance, in Australia a "downy" is what we call a comforter or bed cover in the US. I can usually tell when there is a cultural difference by the physical structure of the written grammar. I've learned to watch for these types of indicators.

Some people probably remember doing an exercise in school where one person stands at a chalkboard and the class gives verbal instructions to guide them through drawing a shape. The person at the chalkboard has not seen the shape. Usually, the result is very different from the intended shape.

The most important instructional writing guideline is "don't assume." Most of us tend to forget to start at the beginning and include absolutely every step. A good experiment is to try writing yourself instructions for a task. Then, follow your instructions exactly as they are written.

My policy is to write e-mail in the same manner I would write a recipe or instruction manual. I try to be clear, concise and present my thoughts step by step. The language I use is simple. I avoid technical terms, e-mail abbreviations and sniglets, unless I've worked with the person enough to know they will understand my references.

Learning to communicate with volunteers primarily via e-mail is an ongoing process, and electronic communication isn't for everyone. John Bergeron of the Glaucoma Research Foundation (also an Affiliate) adds:

It's very hard to teach good e-mail etiquette. Those who use e-mail frequently tend to be much easier to communicate with online. [In my experience,] sometimes it's necessary to tolerate poor e-mail skills and supplement them with phone conversations. I have a lot to learn still about making effective online partnerships!

Some people need encouragement to begin to share ideas online—beyond one-to-one e-mails. Be persistent in encouraging participation in listservs or newsgroups. Here is an e-mailing the two authors sent to VV Project Affiliates when the Project listserv was underutilized:

Hi to everyone! This is a posting from Jayne and Susan together here in Austin, Texas. Susan has been visiting for a few days to conduct volunteer management workshops locally—which was a grand "excuse" for having time together to focus on the Virtual Volunteering Project.

Amazing as it sounds, we are in the last quarter of this two-year Demonstration Phase of the project. This means that the time to write the expected "guidebook" is at hand. Our commitment to our funders is to document your work and create a tool to help others replicate—or innovate!—virtual volunteering programs. The guidebook will be available online sometime next year, but now is the time to gather data and ideas.

So...it's time to get serious about this listserv! Up to now, this has been a rather passive forum. We know Jayne promised "low traffic," but this is extreme! You all have great ideas to share and this is a private, safe, and supportive place to risk discussing problems as well as successes.

To jump start renewed interaction among us, picture this:

You are sitting in your office, thinking about your program. There's a knock on the door. You say "come in" and suddenly we all bound in—affiliate representatives, VV staff and advisors. We're carrying hearty food and a jug of wine (or keg of beer, depending on your preference—after all, this is only a fantasy!). Once we all settle in, we ask you, in a sincere and concerned way: "What's on your mind for which a brainstorming session with all of us might prove useful?" (or, simply, "what's up?!")

You talk, we listen. We give suggestions (even if we don't feel "expert" but still have a thought worth sharing), you listen. No one holds back. No one gets offended. We all accept that our only purpose is to strengthen our virtual volunteering efforts.

THIS CAN ALL COME TRUE—except for the food and drink and noise in your office! Cause after all, we will still all be there! Even better, through the miracle of technology, we can sustain more than one conversation at once. This means that anyone can start a discussion by posting a question or concern, and we don't have to "finish" answering that before also thinking about other concerns.

A note of reassurance: while we do want to stimulate more effective listserv exchange, we still intend to keep the number of posts reasonable. Ideally, it will all be of use to you as well as contribute to our documentation.

OK. The ball is in your court. What's on your mind?

Jayne and Susan

See Appendix B for more resources on Netiquette.

Confidentiality

The issues of confidentiality, privacy and security are important off-line and online, particularly if you are serving any vulnerable population of clients (children, the elderly, the seriously ill, etc.) who deserve special protection. Similarly, volunteers also deserve protection, especially if you serve legal offenders or people with emotional problems.

The first question is: What are your legal obligations? You may be required by law to conduct certain screening procedures and background checks before assigning any volunteer to a client. You may need to bond volunteers who will deal with financial records. In such cases, you must do the same thing with online volunteers as with those whom you see on site.

More than anything else, confidentiality is a training issue. Emphasize the importance of confidentiality at every opportunity. Put a statement about it into every volunteer position description. Add it to orientation materials. Say it in training.

Be sure you explain clearly what you mean by "confidentiality." It is more than not revealing a client's name; it's not revealing any information that would allow someone to guess the identity of the individual involved.

You can (and, in some cases, should) develop a specific pledge of confidentiality—noting that violation of this key principle is cause for dismissal—and ask every volunteer to "sign" it—either virtually or, if necessary, by fax or mail. Don't hesitate to use real paper and real stamps! (Just be sure that any document you ask volunteers to sign mirrors what is also asked in writing of employees.)

In some cases, however, "confidentiality" is a smokescreen put up by staff resistant to volunteer involvement. It can be paternalistic to feel that clients must be "protected" against volunteers who might gossip or somehow betray confidentiality. What are the safeguards to discourage paid staff from doing this? After all, if you really wonder how clients feel about their situation being shared with a volunteer, ask them! If the clients give permission (freely, without any sense that they have to say yes), then it's o.k. to share their identities with the volunteer.

The Internet provides some special ways for parties to remain anonymous. Obviously, you can ask volunteers and clients to select a screen name that does not reveal personal information (and make sure they have not registered this name in any way that can be traced to a real world identity, such as the "Member Profile" on AOL). If you are very concerned about this, offer volunteers and/or clients mail boxes via your own ISP and you assign a screen name. Or move to some sort of password-only system that assures that only legitimate people enter a communications area. Other options are discussed on the VV Project Web site.

Ironically, it may be the X-rated Web sites that give us another option! There are programs that allow someone at one e-mail address to "filter" his or her postings to appear under an anonymous screen name.

Do some research if you feel anonymity is vital to your service—and it may be, if you are running a virtual hotline on a sensitive topic and your contacts might want absolute assurance of secrecy.

Speak to your Webmaster, MIS Department, or whoever is in charge of your system about security precautions already in place. Generally no one wants their e-mail address—or messages!—to be pirated in any way, so there are undoubtedly already safeguards in the system that will work for the volunteer program, too.

To protect volunteers, the same advice applies. Strongly suggest that they do not give their home address or phone number to a client, if that is a concern you (or they) have.

Online Safety and Risk Management

As already discussed in Chapter 4, you must follow the same screening procedures for online volunteers as you would for those who volunteer in person, especially if you are assigning them to work with vulnerable populations. But there is no reason to believe that online volunteers are any more prone to be predators than any other volunteer—and the number of people who actually pose a risk to clients is quite small. By all means, take reasonable precautions, and set and enforce policies about confidentiality and security, but then move on with the work.

If you have clearly articulated critical policies and rules, and have given them to every volunteer, you are practicing risk management. To assure that volunteers understand and accept these policies, you can develop an agreement that highlights the ones you are most concerned about: sexual harassment, discrimination, invasion of privacy, or whatever is appropriate to your setting.

Some people have asked: How do I know the person sending me the completed work is really the person doing the assignment? Well, you don't know. Does it matter? It might depend on the assignment. If this concerns you, use the telephone liberally. Robert Marston, Director of the Community Wire Service posted an interesting response to a similar query—but this time about court-ordered volunteers—on the VV Project listserv:

> *Here's a half-baked idea...There may be public-access computing/e-mail sites such as public libraries where volunteers could "report" to do their work. If they're students, they may be able to use a lab at school. If you service a particular geographic area, then it shouldn't be too hard to compile a list of places that people can go to use the Internet (or to type, or do research, etc.) The librarian (or teacher) on duty could sign that they did, in fact, show up (and showed ID).*
>
> *Another idea: collaboration. There's a program in Pasadena, CA called the Harambee Christian Family Center (www.harambee.org) which has just installed a complete Internet computer lab with fast cable access. They are particularly into reducing crime and*

providing after-school activities in their neighborhood. They might be the kind of place that would host court-ordered volunteers at certain times of the week. They have already offered to recruit more V-Volunteers for CWIRE: court-ordered volunteers might be just the ticket.

Remember that you can ask for references from online volunteers *as part of* your normal screening process. It might be useful to note that the online volunteer is also taking a leap of faith about you and your organization! If the person is geographically distant and will never meet you in person, don't be surprised if s/he asks some background questions about your funding, history, and mission. For this reason, any agreements you ask volunteers to sign ought to include what you promise from your side. Some ideas are:

- confidentiality of the volunteer's name (as negotiated) and e-mail address
- appropriate credit for work produced
- the right to access to a staff liaison for questions and feedback

Volunteers under the Age of 18

Given the number of teenagers who love the Internet and who have already developed greater technology skills than their parents, you are likely to find youngsters under the age of 18 (maybe well under 18) applying for virtual volunteering assignments. Many teens experience difficulty in finding on-site volunteer programs willing to give them meaningful roles, so it's a treat to be valued as an "expert" in the virtual environment. There are excellent resources describing the special risk considerations of working with this age group, notably *Kidding Around? Be Serious! A Commitment to Safe Service Opportunities for Young People* by Anna Seidman and John Patterson (see Appendix B).

An important issue is parental permission. While you may not ask a volunteer applicant for date of birth, you are always permitted to ask "are you under age 18?" Place this question on your online application form. The safest thing to do when someone answers "yes" is to mail or fax a permission slip for parental permission to do the volunteer work. While the majority of the time the type of teen who wants to give online service is responsible, one can anticipate times when an eager teen uses equipment, runs up expenses, etc., without checking it out with his/her folks first.

Use your judgement in terms of parental permission. For a three-hour task, it may not be worth the effort, but for a 15-hour task over three weeks, it's probably useful to have documentation on file that the parents know. By the way, kids expect this. The point is—so do parents. If you publicly post the names of volunteers on your Web site as recognition, you don't want anyone saying: "Who said you could put my kid's name up?"

While this next concern comes under the heading of "worse-case scenario" planning, Jayne and Susan exchanged e-mails on the following subject:

> Jayne: What would I do if a teen e-mailed me about committing violence against themselves or another person? Or if an underage person told me they were engaged in an activity that is illegal for them at this time—leaving home, having sex, drinking, etc?
>
> Susan: My first question is: What would you do if an adult told you the same thing? Drugs and violence are equally illegal for all ages. I'd draw these distinctions:
>
> 1. If you have any knowledge of an imminent crime and can prevent it by reporting it: go to the police.
>
> 2. If you suspect something or hear of something after the fact, and it involves anything like bodily harm to someone else, again go to the police. If it's suicide, contact the parents. If you aren't sure, contact the parents—but make sure someone else in a management position knows about it.
>
> 3. Sex is another matter. While technically the law considers underage sex to be statutory rape, society at large doesn't see it as "illegal" ("immoral" is another thing and in the eye of the beholder). My personal take on this is that sex is the business of the two parties engaging in it. Unless you have reason to feel a rape is involved, or some major catastrophe like AIDS, I'd ignore this subject completely. If the latter, contact the parents.
>
> Overall, I agree that you shouldn't make anyone, including teenagers, jump through hoops. In fact, I suspect this is such a worst-case scenario that I wouldn't even mention it openly to anyone. The policy and procedures can be in place internally. You don't want any teen to think that you'll run to the police or their parents at the drop of a hat. Ideally, if something STARTS to go wrong, you'll catch it and can warn the young person: "This is not acceptable and please stop. Or I'll be forced to contact your parents."

We add the caveat: this is not legal advice, of course. But it is common sense. These issues come up in the real world in working with teenagers in any context. For example, at the volunteer program Susan ran for the Philadelphia Family Court in the 1970s volunteers obviously had to be prepared for the possibility that their teen "match" might talk about drug use or a crime—these were kids on probation, after all. The program differentiated between things that were outright illegal and things

that skirted "moral" issues. Since these teens were under Court jurisdiction anyway, a reporting system was available. But the program also wanted to preserve some sanctity of the volunteer/teen relationship, too. That's what friendship is all about.

Technical Assistance Volunteers

As already described, a technical assistance volunteer is a person who provides support to staff members or other volunteers (such as help with building a Web site or researching program information) rather than an organization's clients (such as mentoring young people). These online volunteers are recruited for their existing expertise and, by design, may be far more skilled in their field of knowledge than anyone else in the organization.

While all of the volunteer management principles outlined in previous chapters apply to technical assistance volunteers, there are some unique aspects to working with this type of expert. Picture these scenarios in your setting:

- a lawyer volunteering to explain a legal issue dealing with human resources
- a computer consultant volunteering to teach someone how to use a computer, use software, or use the Internet
- an accountant volunteering to explain complicated financial reports

Problems can arise in such situations when the volunteer is working with a system or technology that he or she understands quite well, but the staff person doesn't. Or, if the volunteer doesn't fully understand the needs and the resources of the organization he or she is assisting. Just because someone is skilled in a subject, it does not necessarily follow that s/he knows how to be a consultant, advisor, or trainer.

To keep the volunteer experience beneficial rather than frustrating for everyone involved, we offer these suggestions[1]:

- Ask the volunteer to review the “Do’s and Don'ts for Technical Assistance Volunteers” provided at the end of this chapter and on the VV Web site and explain why these tips are particularly important to your organization.
- Communicate your agency's budget and staffing limitations for this assignment. Many volunteers from the for-profit world do not understand that not-for-profit organizations and public sector agencies operate in a world of very limited resources, or that they may not have a staff member devoted solely to human resources, another to legal issues, another to computer systems, etc. Defining these limitations up front can help the volunteer develop an appropriate strategy for your organization before any action is taken.

- If this person is going to help with Web site development or maintenance, is he or she going to have access to your Web server? If so, make sure the volunteer understands that the password information is confidential, and be sure to set up criteria for putting information online (who should review it beforehand and give the final okay?). Also, be sure to change the password immediately upon the end of the volunteer's tenure.

- Ask the volunteer to provide technical documentation (e.g., how parts of a database relate to each other) and user documentation (e.g., how to do the data entry and how to solve the most common problems faced by the user) for the first piece before moving on to the next piece of a volunteer assignment. This way, if the volunteer must discontinue work on the project, the staff has the documentation needed to easily integrate a new volunteer into the project.

- If this person is going to do research, can he or she contact organizations on behalf of your agency? Do you want to be copied on any such e-mails sent? If the organization is going to do outreach via the Internet for your organization, give the volunteer a sample of how you would like e-mails written and signed.

- Do you understand what the volunteer is telling you or suggesting? If not—*ask questions*. The volunteer's professional expertise may involve language different from lay terms, just as you use terms that people outside your field of expertise may not understand.

You can learn more about working with technical assistance providers online from resources given in Appendix B.

Activism Via the Internet

Many organizations channel the resources of volunteer activists to promote various causes, on- and off-line. Before you mobilize volunteers online to send e-mails to individuals and Usenet groups on behalf of your organization, plan strategically to make your efforts successful and positive. In addition, educate yourself and others in your organization about what activities you and your volunteers can engage in legally regarding lobbying, advocacy, and other public policy activities. We recommend two resources:

The *Charity Lobbying in the Public Interest* Web site by the Independent Sector at http://www.indepsec.org/clpi is an excellent place to learn why charity lobbying is important, easy and legal; how your organization can lobby effectively for public policy changes to benefit your mission; and how charities may inform

voters and candidates for elected office about their missions effectively and legally. Also included is a step-by-step guide for following federal law governing charity lobbying.

Publications that resulted from *OBM Watch's NonProfit America* initiative, at http://www.ombwatch.org/www/ombw/npa/npastart.html, can help agencies effectively use communications technologies to enhance and expand their engagement in public policy.

Rather than duplicate the excellent information already on the Web for organizations that want to involve online volunteer activists, we have listed some of the best sites in Appendix B to use along with our suggestions for managing volunteers virtually. These Web sites include real-life examples, tips on how to mobilize online activists, and cautionary tales regarding online activism.

Virtual Board Meetings

Robert's Rules of Order never anticipated Internet technology! While we await a new revision that tackles virtual parliamentary procedure, questions of how to integrate e-mail and online chat rooms into the work of nonprofit boards of directors are being answered on a trial-by-trial basis.

Legality

Please note that most states do not yet recognize online board voting as legally binding. At the time of this publication, the only states that allow this are California and Texas, and they both have specific rules governing the recognition and verification of such votes. The following suggestions apply to non-voting board discussions and notifications. Check with your state or provincial Attorney General for information about the legality of online board transactions in your state.

Related issues are whether and how to "store" electronic communication, when paper originals and handwritten signatures are required, and what substitutes for certified mail. Few states have yet created legislation regarding these questions, and those who have seem to have reached opposite conclusions. As the online world changes rapidly, keep checking legislation in your area over time.

Electronic Communication

Obviously electronic communication eases all sorts of former bottlenecks:

- board meeting announcements are not delayed in snail mail
- RSVP for meetings becomes instant via the "reply" button

- materials needing consideration can be disseminated as they are completed, without having to await a complete "packet" of other information—and each item, when sent separately, can be accompanied by specific notes and queries

- by receiving materials electronically, board members can insert notes, make corrections, and otherwise manipulate each document as they read it

- absent members can still forward their reports to everyone on the day of the meeting, at the latest

- minutes can be distributed as soon as they are ready

In addition, sub-committees of the board can do much of their deliberations by the use of group e-mails, creating miniature listservs that allow all members to respond to each idea posted.

Online "Meetings"

Some boards are experimenting with virtual board discussions to conduct at least some of their work (even if voting must occur in person or be verified by mail or fax). Formats range from online chat room sessions in real time (so that all board members must be electronically "present" and logged on) to such innovative techniques as that used by The Beacon Project, Inc. Executive Director Mike Lowrie sends all trustees and advisors a meeting notice, announcing a two-week, come when you can, board "meeting." Here is his announcement for March 1999:

> ***Board Meeting Notice***
>
> There will be a board meeting beginning noon EST on March 15 and ending midnight EST on March 31. All Trustees and Advisors are encouraged to participate...
>
> You will receive additional information next week. Thanks for your involvement.
>
> Mike Lowrie
> The Beacon Project, Inc.
> helping those who help others
> mike@beaconproject.org

The next e-mail gives everyone a specific URL to go to on the Web (this is not shared publicly, of course):

Dear Advisors and Trustees:

As you know, our board meeting has begun. People have already begun to check-in and some have already cast votes.

The meeting will last through the end of the month. All the necessary information for your consideration is available at the site. If you need further clarification or you wish to discuss a particular issue, there are forums available for information exchange. The instructions at the board meeting pages will explain the various options available.

This board meeting process should prove to be very convenient for you, and over the next several months we will explore ways to make them more effective without losing the convenience.

I am very pleased that Jim Burke, chair of the board affairs committee, has informed me that John Paul has been officially nominated by the committee for election to chair of the board. I look forward to working with John in this new role.

You should have all received a packet of information including our brochure and appeal letter for our Founding Partners Campaign, among other things. If you didn't receive this package, please let me know.

The URL for the board meeting is www.beaconproject.org/trustees (please remember the site is password protected—the user name is XXXX; and the password is XXXX).

Please check-in so we know who has attended. All are encouraged to attend and participate. Trustees, please remember to cast your votes on the pending resolutions. I look forward to your participation.

Thank you.

Mike Lowrie

When board members go to the board meeting site, they find an agenda, information about each item, questions to be considered, and other relevant material. Each board member logs in and posts responses to each item. Votes can be tabulated on the site or through e-mails explicitly sent for voting purposes. Mike compiles a summary of the activity posted during the virtual board “meeting” and sends it in an e-mail to everyone when the meeting is “adjourned.”

Once again, this process may not be legal in your location for voting purposes, but there is nothing to stop you from deliberating on issues or gaining consensus virtually. Save votes, if necessary, for face-to-face meetings—or confirm interim votes when you are together physically.

For non-board-level work, particularly for committees, all of this is a matter of taste, style, comfort level and accessibility to e-mail.

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1 Adapted from *What We Learned (the Hard Way) about Supervising Volunteers* by Jarene Francis Lee with Julia M. Catagnus, Energize, 1999; http://www.energizeinc.com.



Do's and Don'ts for Technical Assistance Volunteers



A technical assistance volunteer is a person who provides support to an agency's staff members or other volunteers (such as help with building a Web site or explaining a legal issue) rather than an organization's clients (such as mentoring young people). Technical assistance volunteers are greatly valued by not-for-profit and public sector agencies.

Picture these scenarios in a not-for-profit and public sector agency setting:

- a volunteer lawyer explaining a legal issue or consideration dealing with human resources
- a volunteer helping someone use a computer, use software, or use the Internet
- a volunteer accountant explaining complicated financial practices to a non-accountant

Problems can arise in such situations when the volunteer expert is assisting a staff person with working with a system or technology that the volunteer understands quite well, but the staff doesn't. How do you balance making the topic accessible in the way you present the subject without talking "down" to the staff person or other volunteer?

To keep your volunteer experience beneficial rather than frustrating for the person or organization you are trying to help, we suggest you keep the following (gathered from various resources) in mind:

1 **Listen to what the staff member and the organization need** as a result of your donated services. Is there a concrete goal or outcome that is wished for as a result of your activities? Making sure you understand the expectations of the organization will help prevent misunderstandings about the service you are providing.

2 **Mutually agree on a plan of action** between you and those you are helping—perhaps the most crucial step of successful technical assistance. Outline the expected outcomes, approaches and resources and estimate the time you think it will take to complete the project.



A not-for-profit or public sector agency can ask a lot of a volunteer, so make it your job to **be clear about what you can and cannot do.** Define the project using milestones that match your available time and skills and meet their needs. Do not over-commit yourself.



If you organization does not train you about volunteering or give you some kind of orientation, **ask for it**! Learn the organization's mission, get an overview of the organization's programs and current events, and have a list of the staff and the board, in case you encounter these people in the course of your service.



Remember that you were a beginner too, once upon a time. Those that you are helping are experts in many areas as well. **Respect their knowledge**, as you would expect them to respect your own. Don't forget that you are talking to professionals; it is ignorance about a particular area, not stupidity, that has put the staff in need of your services.



Respect the time of the staff and other volunteers. They have many responsibilities outside of what you see as a volunteer. They may not be able to devote as much time to an issue as you think they should; help them to do the most they can with the time they have available.



Not-for-profit and public sector agencies operate in a world of very **limited resources** and ever-shrinking budgets. Don't be surprised if they don't have a staff member devoted solely to human resources, legal issues, computer systems, etc. Also don't be surprised if they don't have a budget to buy and maintain a large computer system. Respect those limitations by helping them to do as much as they can with their available resources.



Think about the language you are using to explain something; using terms that only a fellow expert would understand will frustrate the person you are trying to help. Use common language whenever possible, and fully explain technical terms you need to use a lot. Learn what you can about THEIR work and put things in a context they can understand.



If you encounter resistance to a suggestion, particularly in an area in which you consider yourself an expert, try to **diagnose the cause**: differing priorities? lack of information about you? lack of information about them? bad timing? preconceived assumptions? Once you have identified the reason for the resistance, it will be much easier for you to deal with it constructively.



Radiate quality in your service to the agency. For instance, if you are inputting information into a database and misspell a name or enter the wrong phone number, the work you've done is not just useless, it can be damaging!



Build sustainability. Don't just do it for them—involve them in the process. Explain each step, give background, recruit someone to write down procedures or troubleshooting steps if applicable. The most important part of your "mentoring" is that what you leave behind works and can be sustained by the organization.



Provide technical documentation (e.g., how parts of a database relate to each other) and user documentation (e.g., how to do the data entry and how to solve the most common problems faced by the user) for the first piece before moving on to the next piece. This way, if you must discontinue work on the project, the staff has the documentation needed to easily integrate a new volunteer into the project.



Make sure whatever system you recommend for the agency to use, whether this is a type of software or an organizational model, **meets the unique needs of the agency** you are helping. Is this a widely-used system? Is there sufficient documentation available on how the system works? Can the staff effectively use or even alter this system without always relying on your expertise? What kind of support is available for this system?



If you are designing a Web site, a database program, or other computer-related product, **what you may view as a "feature" may be viewed as unnecessary or distracting** by the staff member or other volunteer who has to use it. If a flashy interface doesn't provide the user with an easy-to-use tool, it's of no real use.

Phil Agre of the University of California, San Diego, offers additional excellent advice for people helping others with computer and software use. This information is for traditional, face-to-face volunteer settings, but many of the tips can carry over into online work:

- A computer is a means to an end. The person you're helping probably cares mostly about the end. This is reasonable.
- Their knowledge of the computer is grounded in what they can do and see—"when I do this, it does that." They need to develop a deeper under-

standing, of course, but this can only happen slowly, and not through abstract theory but through the real, concrete situations they encounter in their work.

- By the time they ask you for help, they've probably tried several different things. As a result, their computer might be in a strange state. That's not their fault.

- The best way to learn is through apprenticeship—that is, by doing some real task together with someone who has skills that you don't have.

- Your primary goal is not to solve their problem. Your primary goal is to help them become one notch more capable of solving their problem on their own. So it's okay if they take notes.

- Knowledge lives in communities, not individuals. A computer user who's not part of a community of computer users is going to have a harder time of it than one who is.

- If something is true, show them how they can see it's true.

Some of the above information was also taken, with permission, from Boulder Community Network's excellent online handbook for its volunteers, at: http://bcn.boulder.co.us/volunteer.

The Christian Macintosh Users Group (CMUG) has a page on "How to Work with Volunteers in Desktop Publishing" at: www.cmug.org/H1/yp.workvolunteers.html.

CompuMentor, a nonprofit organization based in San Francisco, California, has an online version of its handbook to prepare its mentors for what to expect in volunteer situations. It's available at: www.compumentor.org/cm/mentors/handbook/handbook_toc.html.

Phil Agre has posted his excellent publications about computing's impact on community and social practice on his Web site at: http://dlis.gseis.ucla.edu/people/pagre. His comments are from "How to Help Someone Use a Computer," an article available at CompuMentor's Web site, which was adapted from *The Network Observer*.

And don't forget to check the Virtual Volunteering Web site at: www.serviceleader.org/vv.



Chapter 9

Involvement of People with Disabilities in Virtual Volunteering

One benefit of online volunteering programs is that they can allow for the greater participation of people who might find volunteering difficult or impossible because of a disability. This in turn allows organizations to benefit from the additional talent and resources of more volunteers.

More than 49 million Americans have some type of disability. People with disabilities volunteer for the same reasons as anyone else. They want to contribute their time and energy to improving the quality of life. They want challenging, rewarding, educational service projects that address needs of a community and provide them with outlets for their enthusiasm and talents.

Just as building designs can help persons who use wheelchairs to navigate doorways, there are ways to accommodate persons with disabilities to serve in virtual volunteering programs. The Virtual Volunteering Project researched and documented ways to encourage this, aided by a special grant from and collaboration with the Mitsubishi Electric America Foundation (MEAF).

People with disabilities who volunteer are first and foremost *volunteers*, not "disabled volunteers." Bringing people with disabilities into a volunteer program should be conducted in the same spirit as it is for those without disabilities.[1]

> *For too long, individuals with disabilities have been viewed as recipients, not providers of service. However, many are fully capable and willing to provide service to others in their community. Their desire to become active volunteers should not be overlooked. Their involvement should not be merely as token volunteers, but as fully-participating, active, and responsible partners of the community service team.*[2]

A volunteer's disability should only be considered in the context of deciding what accommodations will work best for that volunteer. If your organization is mindful of its actions, attitudes and behaviors regarding working with people with disabilities, you can create an environment at your agency where all volunteers feel welcomed.

Of course, online, you may never know which volunteers have any sort of disability. Their physical or mental condition may not interfere with their *ability* to do the work. Other times, an applicant may share information about his or her limitations.

Initial Preparation

In addition to training staff in involving volunteers virtually, we encourage your entire staff to become familiar with readily-available guidelines for working with people with disabilities, and to consider having staff go through training in disability awareness and etiquette. Such guidelines and training can help your staff welcome people with a variety of disabilities.

The most difficult obstacles to surmount for a person with a disability can be the attitudes of others, such as prejudice and stereotyping. An important part of your organization's efforts to welcome and actively recruit people with disabilities as volunteers is to get a sense of your own and your staff's sensitivity to and knowledge about people with disabilities. See Appendix B for references offering self-assessment surveys and other tools for this purpose.

Word Choice[3]

Take a person-first approach to working with volunteers who have disabilities. If the disability isn't germane to the situation at hand, don't mention it. Make reference to the person first, then the disability. Say—or e-mail—"a person with a disability" rather than "a disabled person." Also, a person is not a condition, so avoid presenting someone as "an epileptic" or "a post polio." Instead, say "a person with epilepsy" or "a person who has had polio."

The term "handicapped" comes from the image of a person standing on the corner with a cap in hand, begging for money. A disability is a functional limitation that interferes with a person's ability to walk, hear, talk, learn, etc. Use "handicap" to describe a situation or barrier imposed by society, the environment or oneself. Remember, a person who has a disability isn't necessarily chronically sick or unhealthy. He or she is often just disabled.

When speaking about people with disabilities, emphasize their achievements, abilities and individual qualities. Portray them as they are in real life: as parents, employees, business owners, etc.

Relax. Don't be embarrassed if you use common expressions such as "see ya later" or "gotta run" when speaking with or e-mailing to a volunteer with a disability.

Accommodations

“An accommodation is any adjustment made to the environment which enhances access to, and use of the area. Accommodations vary greatly in complexity and expense.”[4] Volunteers with disabilities probably know more about assistive technologies—software and hardware that allows them to surf the Internet, write documents, etc.—and how to obtain such technologies, than you do. Still, it's a good idea to be aware of some of the tools out there; this will help you see just how much a person can

help your organization via the Internet regardless of physical disability. See Appendix B for a list of excellent resources for making your Web site accessible.

If you are uncertain about the wants or needs of a volunteer with a disability, *ask*! Give volunteers opportunities to tell you what changes might need to be made. Remember in your Web site design that people with disabilities use special tools to browse the Web, and these tools can be confused by some Web site designs and functions.

Recruitment

As with all volunteers, before you start recruiting people with disabilities for your organization, you need to make sure you are ready to place these volunteers immediately into an orientation, initial evaluation and assignment-matching process.

You can reach people with disabilities via your general virtual volunteering recruitment methods. However, there are several ways you can reach out specifically to these audiences. Publicize your volunteer opportunities to:

- schools that work specifically with disabled populations
- independent living centers
- vocational rehabilitation agencies
- disability service groups
- regional offices of rehabilitation services of the Department of Health, Education and Welfare
- Internet discussion groups, as appropriate

Your recruitment message should be the same as it is for all volunteers, in that it should explicitly state that the organization is committed to placing individuals into the volunteer setting which best matches their interests with the needs of the organization.

Working with Online Volunteers with Disabilities

How do you proceed when someone contacts you about a virtual volunteering opportunity as a result of your outreach to disabled communities? In the same way you would with any other person who says they want to volunteer with you: determine the person's interests and skills. Base the matching of the volunteer to a project based upon the person's ability and desire, not the person's disability. The clearer the task description, the less likely a volunteer will get into an assignment he or she cannot do (for whatever reason!).

Encourage volunteers with disabilities do some self-evaluation and self-screening when looking for volunteer opportunities. Just as you should with any volunteer candidate, ask applicants if they think they can do the

assignment, if there is any part of the assignment that might prove particularly difficult to them, and if there is something you can do to help make this easier.

Your volunteer application should *not* ask about disabilities. Not only could this be a violation of the Americans with Disabilities Act, it gives the impression that you match volunteers to assignments based on what they can't do, rather than on what they can.

First Person Benefits of Virtual Volunteering by People with Disabilities

The VV Project has received several testimonials from people with disabilities serving as online volunteers for various organizations around the United States. Here are excerpts:

Online Volunteer in North Carolina:

> *We live in a very rural area that makes the disabled feel cut off from the world. Due to my disability, driving is out of the question. I also have children at home so that limits travel drastically. [Now] I can volunteer from home. I feel that I have learned as much from those I've helped as they have learned from me. I'm helping others as well as taking care of my children. Internet technology allows people to leave their disabilities behind. We are all the same on the Internet. No disabilities, race, or religion. We are united as one person. I recently found out that the fellow I worked with (online) had no light perception. He is a wonderful caring person. His vision loss in no way affected his terrific personality. It has been a wonderful experience.*

Online Volunteer in Danbury, Connecticut:

> *I am a person living with a disability who was home-bound for about three years. I understand the deep impact that Internet access has on people who are in similar situations as I was in, and I would like to pass on this tool to others who are moving towards independence. I would love to conduct information searches, provide basic technical support, and any other service that the Virtual Volunteering Project can teach me to teach others...I will give one-hundred percent of my time and energy to whatever projects you send me.*

Online Volunteer in Arizona:

> *I have extensive technical resources at home. I also have several health problems that preclude driving long distances and working set hours. [By volunteering virtually], I can stretch my skills, work on my own schedule and still "meet" very interesting people. My health sometimes affects my memory and, with computer work, I can organize and document work to*

allow me to deal with many more complex details and more projects than I could handle manually. I can take breaks when needed and not be affecting anyone else.

Online Volunteer in Indiana*:*

We help new disabled users navigate in MSN (Microsoft Network) and the Internet to find information helpful to them in any disability if possible. I joined MSN initially, and visited the disabilities area regularly... I am disabled with severe arthritis. Off-line I have visited with several fellow disabled members I met online, helped them fill out Social Security disability forms, etc. My compelling reason [to volunteer] is I have been frustrated due to my disability...so I help others who are more disabled get benefits or information.

Online Volunteer in Colorado*:*

It started out as something to spend my time while awaiting disability for an injury. It continues because I like it. I have trouble working in an office environment due to my disability. My work schedule must be done in 20-60 minute increments with long rest periods between. The Net gives me the opportunity to work the hours I can. Working from my home, I am able to work for 20 or 30 minutes and then lie down to rest or lounge in a chair with my neck and shoulders supported. Since the injury involves degenerative joint disease in my neck this is very important.

Online Volunteer in New York *(*who became an online volunteer with groups she had supported on-site before becoming disabled. She also has become a volunteer with some of the organizations that provided services for her when she was in the hospital and afterward):

[Volunteering virtually is] physically easier for me. I sometimes have anxiety attacks, which makes it hard to go to unfamiliar places or places which do not feel safe...Access to a computer and a desk would be difficult so working from home is easier. Also, Internet access is very slow from the office and much better at my house.

Through a project entitled "Creating a Shared Learning Space," students with intensive physical and developmental disabilities attending classes in a separate private school met and interacted with students in a typical public school miles away via cyberspace, where the communication and social differences between the students were minimized by the common format of electronic communication. Not only were the students remotely located, but their communication systems ranged from typical 11- and 12-year-old verbal and written language to symbolic picture communication systems. "By using the 'least common communicator' system of symbolic

pictures, the students were able to correspond with each other and began to work on common curriculum units at levels appropriate to their functional abilities." See: http://www.dinf.org/csun_98/csun98_173.htm and http://www.bc.edu/bc_org/avp/soe/campsch/cpbWeb/project.html.

> *The experience of many classroom-based inclusion efforts has been that more normal social relationships have been the major benefit to students with intensive disabilities. To date, this project has demonstrated that these more normal social relationships can also be developed in cyberspace. With additional time, it is hoped that substantial academic benefits for both groups of students will also be achieved.*

Learning Disabilities or Emotional and Anxiety Disorders

A person managing an online volunteer program needs to have a general understanding of various learning styles, working styles and information-processing styles. Volunteer management is not "one-size-fits-all," and simple adjustments in management style can be made to effectively channel talents and resources of the greatest number of people.

Volunteer program managers working with online volunteers or looking to provide service delivery online should also be aware of seemingly "hidden" or "nonapparent" disabilities, such as learning disabilities (the most common form of disability), and emotional and anxiety disorders. Unlike other disabilities, such as paralysis, blindness, or even chronic illnesses, learning disabilities and emotional and anxiety disorders don't offer obvious visible signs to the casual observer, and can, therefore, seem "hidden" to someone working with online volunteers.

A learning disability (LD) is a disorder that affects a person's ability to either interpret what is seen or heard or to link information from different parts of the brain. These limitations can show up in many ways—as specific difficulties with spoken and written language, coordination, self-control, or attention. They may impair multiple skills and abilities or they may impair only one. For example, difficulties with spelling may affect learners' writing skills, but not their reading skills. Learning disabilities include Dyslexia and Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD). The National Institutes of Health estimates that 15-20% of the total population has LD.

Emotional and anxiety disorders are also disabilities. These can include people who suffer from depression, frequent anxiety, panic attacks, phobias, obsessive-compulsive disorder and post-traumatic stress disorder. DON'T confuse these disabilities with lack of intelligence or lack of talent! In fact, many people considered gifted or with very high I.Q.s also have learning disabilities or anxiety disorders. Some "gifted but LD" individuals were/are Albert Einstein, Agatha Christie, John F. Kennedy, Whoopi Goldberg, Nelson Rockefeller, Cher, George Patton, Leonardo daVinci and Alexander Graham Bell. People with emotional and anxiety disorders include Abraham Lincoln, Edgar Allen Poe, Kim Basinger, Barbra Streisand and many, many others.

A volunteer program manager does not have to become an expert in disabilities to involve people with disabilities as volunteers. Educating yourself about various disabilities in general, however, can help you learn to better accommodate a variety of volunteers in your program. Neither the Virtual Volunteering Project staff nor its advisors are experts in disabilities, and the brief information here is only a stepping-stone to learn more about working with people who have disabilities. In compiling this information, we used resources from a variety of Web sites by scholars and practitioners who have studied or worked with people, particularly youth, with "nonapparent" disabilities, and worked with adults with different work and learning styles. These are listed for you in Appendix B or on the VV Web site.

Special thanks to other Mitsubishi Electric America Foundation grantees, Dr. Sarah Jane Rehnborg of the Charles A. Dana Center at the University of Texas at Austin, and Meg Young of Oregon Literacy, Inc. (OLI) for their wonderful suggestions and contributions to this material.

1 From “Disability Etiquette” by Paraquad, a St. Louis-based not-for-profit organization, available at their Web site at http://www.paraquad.org.

2 From “Training Manual for Working with Youth Volunteers Who Have Disabilities,” produced by Youth Volunteer Corps; http://www.yvca.org.

3 Paraquad, *Ibid*.

4 Youth Volunteer Corps, *Ibid*.



Conclusion

Accommodating All Abilities

The following ten tips were originally conceived as the ending to Chapter 9 on working with online volunteers who have disabilities. But the more we and our manuscript readers reviewed the list, we agreed that these same suggestions are fundamental to the successful management of ANY volunteer. They help a volunteer program manager accommodate a variety of work styles, regardless of the reason for differences.

So, as a summary of best practices outlined in this *Guidebook*, here are the tips:

1. *Recognize that working with technology is stressful.*

For most people, computers and the Internet are very new ways to access and manage information. Virtual volunteering is only a few years old, and the vast majority of people you are working with will have no experience with providing service online. Keeping things simple and user-friendly will prevent many frustrations and keep volunteers feeling good about their involvement with your organization.

2. *Describe what volunteer assignments are like at your agency, and what online volunteering at your agency will be like.*

Are most directions to online volunteers communicated via e-mail? How many e-mails, on average, will a volunteer receive a week as part of this program? Is there a lot of reading and preparation involved to volunteer at your agency? Answer these questions on your Web site and in other materials that describe virtual volunteering at your agency. Make sure this is information a volunteer sees before he or she completes your online application.

3. *Recognize the abilities, goals and work styles of each volunteer, and make assignments that are appropriate to those abilities, goals and work styles.*

Let volunteers make this evaluation themselves, via your online application or a skills assessment survey. Ask potential volunteers:

- What kinds of assignments do you want to do?
- In what areas do you feel you are an expert, and in what areas would you like more experience?

- Do you like having assignments chosen for you, or do you like to choose an assignment for yourself from what's available?
- Do you like working on assignments in one sitting of concentrated hours, or in tiny pieces over several days?

This pre-screening sets the tone for what volunteering with your organization will be like, for both you and the volunteer. It also helps match volunteers appropriately with assignments and, in some cases, will help you (as volunteer program manager) and a potential volunteer to determine if volunteering at your agency is appropriate for him or her.

4. *Break down volunteer assignments into the smallest task "pieces" possible*.

This allows the volunteer to focus on just one component at a time, and avoid feeling overwhelmed. It may be possible for your agency to create even shorter assignments than the five-hour initial test activities already suggested. You can even break your online orientation process down to small pieces that can be completed in less-than-one-hour each, and use this as the initial assignments for all new volunteers. Give volunteers repeated opportunities to let you know what kinds of assignments they want to undertake.

5. *Provide volunteers with models of what they should be doing, or what an assignment should look like at its completion.*

This is a variation on “a picture’s worth a thousand words.” Especially when communicating by e-mail, you can’t be sure your instructions make sense. Having a sample of similar work will illuminate your instructions immeasurably.

6. *Have many different types and levels of assignments available*.

Some assignments, like online research, require a great deal of reading. Other assignments, such as creating a .cgi file for an automated form, don't require any reading at all, but do require excellent attention to detail. Some assignments may have a very tight deadline of a few days, while others could be done at a volunteer's own pace over the course of a few weeks. Have a variety of these types of assignments available, and describe them in terms of the skills and time needed when offering them to volunteers. Then let volunteers self-select the assignments most appropriate for them.

7. *Simplify language as much as possible, and reinforce directions through re-phrasing rather than through verbatim repetition*.

People can (and do) misinterpret written communications. Be prepared for this, and adjust written directions accordingly.

8. *Some volunteers may need both oral and visual directions.*

Would directions by phone be easier to communicate than directions via e-mail? When possible, use online methods other than just e-mail to explain tasks, such as charts, photos, graphics, and cartoons. If the volunteer is geographically nearby and has transportation available, you may want to set up a face-to-face meeting.

9. *Many volunteers need (and even expect) immediate answers and feedback regarding assignments*.

Make a commitment to answer all e-mails within 48 hours (two business days) of receipt, and let volunteers know when you have received an assignment. Without quick response from you, volunteers may feel frustrated, isolated and unsupported.

10. *Focus on outcomes rather than techniques, whenever possible*.

This allows volunteers to approach their tasks in the ways in which they feel most comfortable. People with attention or behavior problems do best in a structured environment, one where expectations and rules are clearly communicated to them, and where tasks are carefully designed for manageability and clarity.

Realize that some volunteers will see you mainly as a facilitator and will need little guidance or support; others will need more supervision, instruction and contact. By being able to adjust your management style to different volunteers, you will not only empower more volunteers to succeed and be able to benefit from the talents of the greatest number of people possible, but you will also become a better human resources manager!

How to Be a Champion for Virtual Volunteering

Our final words are directed to you, the volunteer program manager. Your tone and attitude demonstrate your commitment to virtual volunteering and contribute to a successful program. Be a champion!

Provide vision.

Virtual volunteering is an educational process. Resistance may exist because of a lack of understanding. Be aware of the changing needs of your working environment and demonstrate how virtual volunteering can meet those needs.

Be an advocate for your program.

Clear understanding and constant promotion of the benefits of virtual volunteering are essential.

Practice what you preach.

Are you involving at least one online volunteer yourself? You need to obtain first-hand experience about virtual volunteering and model best practices for the rest of the organization!

Become the subject-matter expert.

Keep your eyes and ears open for all information pertaining to virtual volunteering and even telecommuting, and how virtual activities are being conducted around the world (subscribing to VIRTUAL VERVE can help you do this! See page 113).

Don't force virtual volunteering on anyone.

Participation by staff or volunteers should be voluntary. Explaining the benefits carefully to prospective online volunteers and managers enables them to make an educated choice.

Good Luck

We hope that this *Guidebook* has given you the confidence to apply your proven volunteer management skills in cyberspace. We are all on the learning curve together. See you on the Web!





About the Authors

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Susan is President of Energize, Inc., a training, consulting, and publishing firm that specializes in volunteerism. She founded the Philadelphia-based company in 1977 and since that time has assisted clients in North America, Europe, South America and Asia to create or strengthen their volunteer corps.

Susan is the author or co-author of nine books, including *From the Top Down: The Executive Role in Volunteer Program Success* and *The Volunteer Recruitment Book*. From 1981 to 1987 she was Editor-in-Chief of *The Journal of Volunteer Administration*. She has written more than 70 articles on volunteer management for dozens of publications and writes the national bi-monthly column, "On Volunteers," for *The NonProfit Times*.

Susan is the volunteerism faculty member for The Learning Institute for Nonprofit Organizations' satellite broadcast training series, in cooperation with PBS Adult Education Services. Her interest in new technology has taken Energize into cyberspace, where its innovative Web site has won international recognition as a resource for volunteer program leaders: http://www.energizeinc.com.

She was the recipient of the Association for Volunteer Administration's 1989 Harriet Naylor Distinguished Member Service Award. Susan is an active volunteer in a variety of volunteerism associations, the New Society Educational Foundation, and Global Children's Organization.

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Jayne has been the manager of the Virtual Volunteering Project since its launch in December 1996. She has presented workshops on virtual volunteering, online outreach and culture, using online technologies, database management, newsletter production, public relations and grant-writing for various organizations, including the International Conference on Volunteer Administration (1997 and 1998), Points of Light Foundation National Conference in New York City, the Texas Governor's Conference on Volunteer Leadership, the Support Center for Nonprofit Management in San Francisco, the *Philanthropy Journal*'s series on Nonprofits and Technology in Washington, D.C., Dallas and Denver, and the 1996 American Chamber of Commerce Executives Conference. She is a regular contributor to various Internet discussion groups, and facilitates the soc.org.nonprofit newsgroup.

Jayne's own nationally-recognized Web site, http://www.coyotecom.com, offers extensive technology tips for not-for-profit and public sector agencies.



Appendix A

The Virtual Volunteering Project Affiliates Program

During the first phase of the Virtual Volunteering (VV) Project, December 1996 to December 1998, the Project Team worked directly and formally with twelve organizations to help them develop or expand effective and ongoing programs to involve online volunteers. These direct collaborations also allowed the Project Team to detail first hand the realities of setting up and maintaining a virtual volunteering program.

These affiliate organizations were selected based on their knowledge of basic volunteer management issues; their success with volunteers in traditional, face-to-face settings; their vision for virtual volunteering at their own organization, particularly as it involved volunteers working directly with clients; their commitment to the Affiliates guidelines; their knowledge of basic Internet navigation and use; and their demonstrated commitment to timely communications via e-mail.

Staff and volunteers at the twelve Affiliates profiled below (and listed alphabetically) shared experiences about their online volunteering activities and virtual volunteering management issues, tried out suggestions from the VV Project staff and each other, and offered advice that has been incorporated into the Virtual Volunteering Project Web site.

For more detailed profiles, as well as quotes from staff and volunteers at these affiliate agencies about their management of online volunteers and direct links to volunteering materials on their sites, visit http://www.serviceleader.org/vv/orgs.

Project Affiliates

Arizona Pioneers' Home Volunteers Association
http://aztec.asu.edu/azph/
Penny Leisch, Coordinator
Prescott, Arizona

This all-volunteer, not-for-profit support organization promotes community awareness about the historic Arizona Pioneers' Home and provides a variety of volunteer services to its residents.

The Arizona Pioneers' Home began offering residents of Arizona who are over 60 years of age assisted living and skilled nursing care in "territorial" days (before statehood). Arizona's disabled miners have received free care since 1929. The building that houses the Arizona Pioneers' Home is listed on the National Historic Register and is located in a small rural community, so many of the resources available in larger metro areas are not easily accessible.

The Association's affiliation with the Virtual Volunteering Project helped them develop online volunteer involvement to benefit staff, volunteers and Home residents. They are currently exploring ways to bring online volunteers and the Home's residents together in cyberspace as well.

The Association involves online volunteers to assist its own on-site volunteers with various online research projects. The Association also uses the Internet to connect with potential volunteers in its own geographic area.

Throughout its Web site, the Virtual Volunteering Project features comments and suggestions by Penny Leisch, who has worked with these online volunteers, regarding online communications and culture.

Austin Free-Net
http://www.austinfree.net
Ana Sisnett, Executive Director
Austin, Texas

Austin Free-Net (AFN) is a not-for-profit organization and a cooperative effort involving educational, civic, and corporate entities in Austin, Texas. AFN provides online access for the general populace of Austin to promote educational excellence, economic vitality and community involvement. AFN works closely with numerous agencies in the area, is responsible for the public access centers in many libraries, and helps to address the needs of children and youth in low-income families. By using the Internet, young people are introduced to the broad array of possibilities for their lives while connecting with critical educational and health services needed by their families.

Online volunteers have helped keep the Austin Free-Net site maintained and added new features to the Web site, such as online databases and message boards. They have also helped with program research. Other AFN volunteers have performed a mixture of face-to-face and online service as part of their assignments. For instance, students from the University of Texas have helped students at the Austin Learning Academy, an organization with which AFN is affiliated, to design their own Web sites, using a combination of on-site and online assistance. College students involved in AFN projects have also formed online workgroups to help each other and keep internal communications flowing.

Off-line, AFN volunteers teach a “Surfing 101” class to community members in libraries and community centers.

Boulder Community Network
http://bcn.boulder.co.us/volunteer
Brenda Ruth, Volunteer Coordinator
Boulder, Colorado

The mission of Boulder Community Network (BCN) is to facilitate the broad use of information technology to benefit the community. With an emphasis on Internet technologies, BCN also is concerned with innovation for public sector applications. BCN prides itself in bringing the "people" into information technology and the Internet.

Brenda Ruth, the Volunteer Coordinator at the time, said, "BCN would not exist without volunteers. They are involved in day-to-day maintenance of the BCN site, working with non-profits, overseeing public access sites, teaching classes and innovating new services for BCN." Volunteers at BCN are involved both on- and off-line and represent a variety of demographics.

> *BCN's more than 75 volunteers include three high school students and about 12 seniors and lots in between. Most are well educated and many work for themselves or work for a 'hi tech' company. However, there are quite a few designers who have learned Internet skills in community college and just want to do projects for the joy of it. We also have volunteers who are limited in activities by their health and find working from home gives them a sense of being needed and belonging. We also get unemployed techies wanting to improve skills or learn more and make connections*.

BCN chose to become a part of the Affiliates program so they could be exposed to other opportunities, participate in an open discussion about what works and doesn't, and offer their expertise in the area of online volunteering. "BCN wanted to be a part of the affiliate program because it represents a future that we can barely imagine. BCN wants to build in numbers of volunteers and non-profits served, but also to increase the community beyond physical county borders."

> *[The Virtual Volunteering Project] is a means for people making a difference to connect and share ideas and have easy access to information. Each of the affiliates has a specific role and services they give. Each is unique, but part of a whole movement in bringing people together and making a difference in their communities; BCN's participation is truly in pursuit of a network. The present affiliates (and the Virtual Volunteering Project) are bringing people together with shared interests and the social outcomes that are yet unseen, and that is exhilarating. Any type of volunteering impacts people's lives and virtual volunteering opens avenues for people who are too shy to do "soup kitchen lines" or have some disability that prevents them. Virtual volunteering is a way to get these people involved in the greater community and BCN wants to be a part of that.*

A section of BCN's Web site <http://bcn.boulder.co.us/volunteer> is devoted entirely to potential and current volunteers. It's a model for other organizations that want to communicate with all volunteers.

Community Wire Service
Glendale, California
Robert Marston, Director
http://www.cwire.com/WWWolunteers

Community Wire Service (CWIRE) is an online civic network for the Arroyo Verdugo communities of Southern California (Burbank, Glendale, La Cañada Flintridge, Pasadena, South Pasadena) and other parts of Los Angeles. Community Wire Service has operated on an all-volunteer basis since 1993.

CWIRE's WWWolunteers are volunteer Web developers and community volunteers working together to help local charities and service organizations to take advantage of the Web. "The WWWolunteers help people to use the WWW to help people." WWWolunteers also supplied training and technical support to local nonprofits and other volunteers as needed.

As an Affiliate, CWIRE director Robert Marston provided information on how he worked with CWIRE's WWWolunteers, and asked questions of other Affiliates to deal with various online volunteer management issues.

The Evergreen State Society
http://www.tess.org
Putnam Barber, President
Seattle, Washington

The Evergreen State Society (TESS) "strengthens healthy communities by fostering nonprofits and informal organizations." The Society also helps maintain the NONPROFIT/soc.org.nonprofit FAQ (frequently asked questions and their answers) <http://www.nonprofits.org/npofaq>, with the volunteer assistance of more than a dozen professionals from the not-for-profit sector, using information posted to the list and newsgroup.

TESS also collaborated with other nonprofit professionals to create an online "test" of how well the new IRS requirements regarding publicly disclosing applications for tax exemption (IRS Form 1023 or 1024) and annual information returns (IRS Form 990) were understood by the nonprofit community. These new rules for public accessibility of 990s took effect June 8, 1999. Online volunteers from around the US requested the latest 990 from each of five organizations on June 9, 1999 and provided a summary of how the nonprofit responded. Their findings were summarized for a report by TESS.

Through the affiliates program, the Evergreen Society learned procedures to build effectiveness for its volunteers and its projects.

Glaucoma Research Foundation
http://www.glaucoma.org
Laura Deaton, Communications and Outreach Director
San Francisco, CA

Glaucoma Research Foundation (GRF) is a national not-for-profit organization working to protect the sight and independence of individuals with glaucoma through research and education, with the ultimate goal of finding a cure.

The Foundation involves volunteers off-line in a variety of functions: project planning, events, fund raising, outreach, information and referral, operations, communications, research coordination, and general office tasks.

The Foundation uses the Internet for recruitment and ongoing correspondence with volunteers, many of whom are based in cities around the U.S. and help educate their communities about glaucoma and the resources available for those who are diagnosed with it. Laura Deaton, Communications and Outreach Director, uses the Internet to interact with online advisor volunteers around the U.S. about volunteer recruitment and program outreach strategies.

The Foundation would like to use the Internet to orient and manage off-site volunteers, and to build more project management, volunteer orientation and evaluation into their Web site. The Foundation is also looking into ways to create virtual components of its phone support networks.

John Bergeron, the Foundation's former volunteer manager and active participant in the VV Project Affiliate program, said: “GRF has grown to include many off-site volunteers and I thought the VV project would provide a great resource for setting up the project. In addition, the project fit in with our organizational philosophy, which encourages collaboration." In particular, the Glaucoma Research Foundation used the Virtual Volunteering Project resources to develop a better system to manage its off-site volunteers and staff working in other affiliated offices and remote locations.

A section of the Glaucoma Research Foundation Web site <http://www.glaucoma.org/you-can-help.html> is devoted entirely to potential and current volunteers. It's a good example for other organizations wanting to communicate with all volunteers, particularly those in remote offices. Advice from John on how to work with volunteers via e-mail, as well as advice from other Affiliate organizations, can be found in “Online Culture: Ways We Interpret Information Via E-mail” <http://www.serviceleader.org/vv/culture.html>.

LibertyNet
http://www.libertynet.org
Victoria Pellegrini Cooper, Community Service Manager
Pete Golden, Volunteer Coordinator
Philadelphia, PA

LibertyNet was a not-for-profit organization based in Philadelphia. It was one of the VV Project's first affiliated organizations, and one of the first organizations in the nation both to involve volunteers virtually and to use the Internet as a central part of it’s volunteer management. LibertyNet was interested in encouraging non-profit and social change organizations to make use of the Web for meeting specific organizational goals: increasing membership, recruiting volunteers and employees, fund raising, publicizing special events, providing a forum for community feedback, soliciting equipment and other donations, conducting media outreach, etc.

LibertyNet trained collaborating nonprofits how to recruit volunteers on the Internet and hoped further to teach more nonprofits in the greater Philadelphia area better and more concrete ways to use the Internet as a powerful tool to mobilize volunteer resources. LibertyNet provided extensive information to the VV Project and its Affiliates about how they

recruited and involved volunteers via the Internet, and provided information on what worked and what didn't. Much of their advice has been incorporated into the Virtual Volunteering Project Web site.

Vicki Pellegrini, who began at LibertyNet as a VISTA, said in 1997:

> *When I set up LibertyNet's volunteer Web site and mailing list, I had no idea what I was doing. It has taken a while for LibertyNet to figure out all the management behind a volunteer program and it would have been easier if we had some guidance. I hope my experiences will help others who are just starting to think about the Internet as a way to reach out to volunteers. I also know that a lot of what we are doing needs improvement because it was originally done on the fly. I want to use the expertise of the people involved in this project to re-think how to better serve our volunteers and to make this a great experience for everyone.*

The factors that promoted the success of LibertyNet's virtual volunteering program were having someone in charge of posting opportunities and "the great reputation that LibertyNet has in the community has helped attract volunteers to us."

The Virtual Volunteering Project Manager, Jayne Cravens, was on LibertyNet's list for its volunteers for two years, observing how the staff at LibertyNet interacted with its volunteers electronically. This first-hand look at their online volunteer management systems, as well as advice from Vicki, contributed to information developed by the Project to help other agencies use the Internet to communicate with all volunteers.

LibertyNet is no longer a not-for-profit organization, having been acquired by a for-profit company in the Spring of 1999. It has discontinued all volunteer involvement, on- or off-line. However, the organization's lessons learned regarding virtual volunteering have been preserved on the Virtual Volunteering Project Web site.

Oregon Literacy, Inc.
Serving Oregon and Southwest Washington state.
http://www.hevanet.com/literacy
Meg Young, Executive Director
Portland, OR

Oregon Literacy, Inc. (OLI), based in Portland, Oregon, works to increase literacy in Oregon and Southwest Washington state. OLI achieves this mission through support and awareness for local adult literacy programs throughout the state. Meg Young, Executive Director, recruits, trains and supports OLI's office volunteers, and manages the system that matches several hundred volunteers with local literacy programs each year.

For office volunteers, Meg meets with candidates in person, via telephone or through e-mail, to discuss why they're interested in volunteering for OLI, what they hope to get out of their volunteer work, and what skills they're most interested in bringing to OLI or developing through

their volunteer time. She also provides information on OLI's work, history, and projects that might match their interests.

OLI is in the planning stages of developing contact lists specifically for literacy providers, and would like these placed online, preferably in a database that the practitioners can query.

> *We would also like to develop a literacy "quiz" that engages visitors in learning more about adult literacy across the state…We have small space and limited resources on site. Online volunteers, bringing their own resources, have an exciting potential to move our work forward quickly. Because I have used the Internet to complete work projects before, with partners located across the country, I'm confident of the ability to transfer this skill to managing volunteers.*

Meg made significant contributions to the Virtual Volunteering Project's suggestions for accommodations for online volunteers who have learning disabilities or emotional and anxiety disorders <http://www.serviceleader.org/vv/atech/hidden.html>. This information helps volunteer program managers address the various learning styles and working styles of volunteers, and is part of the Project's overall suggestions for working via the Internet with volunteers who have disabilities. This new material inspired Meg to set up a page of links to LD resources on the OLI Web pages as well.

Sidelines National Support Network
http://www.sidelines.org
Tracy Hoogenboom, Administrative Director
Annie Douglas, E-mail Coordinator
California

Sidelines is a pregnancy-support group with more than 5,000 volunteers, more than 250 of which are online volunteers. Sidelines—so named because women with pregnancy complications can feel stuck on the sidelines of life—has counseled approximately 31,000 people during the organization's six-year existence. Sidelines volunteers provide emotional support to pregnant women coping with long term hospitalization or home bedrest, pregnancy complications, leaving a job or "normal" life due to pregnancy complications, etc.

Most of the volunteers are young moms who have other children in the home, and many received assistance from Sidelines during their own pregnancies. They come from all backgrounds, all cultures, all areas, all educational backgrounds, and have all different pregnancy conditions.

Sidelines has 35 chapter coordinators throughout the U.S. who deal with the volunteers in their geographic areas. Volunteers stay in contact via phone, e-mail and newsletter. In addition to helping with support and counseling, Sidelines' online volunteers have helped with staff-support projects, such as submitting the Web site address to various search engines, creating Web pages, grants research and proposal writing, etc. Six online volunteers also serve as coordinators for other online volunteers.

"Our online volunteering program has grown bigger than we even imagined, and currently we have more requests for support than we can handle! Most volunteers are taking 2-3 moms per month."

Before Sidelines became an Affiliate, Annie Douglas was already incorporating information from the VV Project Web site into her materials for Sidelines online volunteers:

> *The Web site has so much useful information for managers of virtual volunteers like I am! I have learned many of your suggestions on my own already, but found lots of other suggestions helpful too. Your web page "Are you ready to volunteer?" has a WONDERFUL list that is particularly helpful. I enjoy my position so much and feel that we have so much to offer with our online volunteers to the high risk families that we support all over the world.*

Annie shared information with other affiliates on how to use e-mail newsletters to keep volunteers in-touch with what's happening at an organization, and how to maintain activity on a Web-based chat area. She does an online update/newsletter each month for virtual Sidelines volunteers and coordinators.

> *People really enjoy seeing how Sidelines is doing online each month and it gives me the opportunity to keep them up to date as far as our web site and other pertinent info. I like it because it doesn't take a lot of time like a traditional "hard copy" newsletter—no time spent on intricate layout, graphics, printing, postage etc.*

A section of the Sidelines Web site is devoted entirely to potential and current volunteers. This section includes profiles of online volunteers and detailed answers to volunteer questions such as: "What makes a volunteer qualified to provide support?" and "Supporting Expectant Mothers Anywhere Via E-mail." <http://www.serviceleader.org/vv/culture/sidelines.html> is a further profile of Sidelines and is part of a special section on the VV Project Web site: "Connecting Humans: Essays on the Positive Side of Online Culture." <http://www.serviceleader.org/vv/culture/index.html> is a section providing information, essays and examples that illustrate how cyberspace is bringing us together, not closing us off from each other.

SmartGrrls
http://www.smartgrrls.org
Rachel Muir, Executive Director
Austin, Texas

SmartGrrls is a not-for-profit organization in Austin, Texas founded in October 1997. Its mission is to encourage young women to believe in themselves and pursue paths to education and opportunity in science, math and technology.

SmartGrrls Educational Outreach Program utilizes hands-on activities in math, engineering, physics and computer science to educate, inspire and support a new generation of leaders in science, math and technology. The Program offers:

- classroom presentations on science, math, technology, multimedia and literature
- youth leadership training
- field trips
- guest speaker series
- mentorship support

The girls who participate in SmartGrrls programs are suggested by elementary and middle school teachers because they are having trouble in science and math classes, or once did well in science and math and then experienced a drop in grades in these areas, but not other academic areas. In its first year, 40% of the girls who participated in SmartGrrls ended up in accelerated science and math programs.

SmartGrrls volunteer mentors are primarily college-level women from three departments at UT Austin: the Texas Institute of Computational and Applied Mathematics, the College of Natural Sciences, and the Student Chapter of the Society of Women Engineers. Most volunteers are women either studying or working in math, science, engineering or technology fields.

SmartGrrls developed an online mentoring program through its affiliation with the Virtual Volunteering Project.

San José Children's Musical Theater
http://www.sjcmt.com
Tegan McLane, Theater as Digital Activity (TADA) Coordinator
San José, CA

The Theater as Digital Activity (TADA) program at San José Children's Musical Theater is a perfect example of an organization fully and successfully integrating virtual volunteering and online service delivery into what it already does well.

The first TADA project took place over a whole year: 45 young people throughout the U.S. with serious illnesses and disabilities were linked via an online chat room to work online with the San José Children's Musical Theater (SJCMT). They shared fears and frustrations with young actors in San José, the theater artistic director Kevin Hauge, and playwright and TADA coordinator Tegan McLane. The result was "Pulse, the Rhythm of Life," an original musical which premiered in May 1998 in San José, with young actors portraying characters who were "a mosaic of wounded, hurting kids whose loneliness is lessened by a keyboard and the knowledge that other children similarly suffer," according to a feature article in the *San Jose Mercury News*.

Just before the production was launched, Tegan noted, "The new virtual component allows us to be even more inclusive, welcoming kids who are isolated by sickness or geographic distance and sharing the magic of theater with them."

SJCMT is committed to providing excellent, accessible musical theater training for youth, with high-quality performances for families and the entire community. TADA is an extension of this endeavor. "Our online participants, who are mostly junior high, high school and college-age kids, are considered both clients and volunteers. The kids contribute ideas to our original musicals via the Internet, e-mail and live chats."

TADA has an outline of its second production, "OUR TREE: The Family Chronicles," posted on its Web site, and has invited feedback from online volunteers about the production's scenes. TADA's third original musical inspired by youth online is already underway as well; this new show will be set in the year 2101 and online contributors will offer suggestions about what the world will be like a hundred years from now.

TADA also incorporates volunteer involvement with regular season shows at SJCMT. For instance, cast members (all youth volunteers) and young people around the world will help shape the upcoming production of *Evita* by working as "online dramaturgs" through a bilingual interactive Web site. Each week until the production, Director Kevin Hauge and members of his production team pose research questions and invite input on certain aspects of the show. "The site is available in both English and Spanish, thanks to the dedicated work of our volunteer translators," says Tegan. A SJCMT parent heads the translation team, with additional support from a Spanish student in Florida who is volunteering online.

SJCMT also involves volunteers virtually in .HTML programming (one online volunteer designs and produces all of the theater's performance programs), and uses its Web site to recruit volunteers for off-line tasks.

Tegan prepared detailed information to help other organizations wanting to work with volunteers and clients via chat rooms, based on her own experiences with TADA. This information focuses on the human aspects that make such interactions successful, rather than the technology. The VV Project combined this information with other material for a chat resource page: <http://www.serviceleader.org/vv/chat.html>.

TxServe
http://www.txserve.org
Betsy Clubine, Project Coordinator
Austin, Texas

This is a nationally-recognized, Texas-based project to serve the leaders and managers of volunteer and community service initiatives. TxServe is a project of the Charles A. Dana Center of the University of Texas at Austin in collaboration with the Texas Commission of Volunteerism and Community Services (a state agency).

Betsy Clubine has been the coordinator of the TxServe Project since its inception in 1996 and has developed most of the resources on the site, such as its resource guide for recruiting volunteers in Texas. She works directly with all TxServe online volunteers, developing volunteer assignments and supervising and evaluating volunteers.

> *Volunteers are recruited for very specialized positions via word of mouth and via the core group of Virtual Volunteering Project volunteers <http://www.serviceleader.org/vv/vols99.html>. We are also contacted by volunteers who have visited TxServe and are interested in supporting our work. They are mostly professionals in the field of volunteer management. We have had one volunteer, a software engineer at a local computer company, who helped us think through the technical needs of a proposed TxServe searchable database.*

As a project designed to support the effective leadership of volunteers via Web-based resources, TxServe is dedicated to building its own capacity to support virtual volunteering. Betsy has involved about a dozen online volunteers so far:

> *We started small, and hope to slowly expand the number of opportunities available. Initially, online volunteers have focused on our immediate need for Web design, Internet research and programming support. Ultimately, however, TxServe would like to find ways to integrate virtual volunteering into our operations more broadly.*

Virtual Volunteering Project Advisors
1996 - 1999

Cheryl Cole Dodwell
ColeDodwell@worldnet.att.net

An IOL board member and a member of the Virtual Volunteering Project's original team of advisors, Cheryl served for three years as publisher and general manager of Who Cares, Inc., an entrepreneurial nonprofit organization which publishes the national magazine: *Who Cares: The Magazine for People Who Do*. She founded and directed the corporate volunteer program for The Fresh Air Fund, and is a founding board member of the MBA-Nonprofit Connection. She currently works with the not-for-profit organization Share Our Strength.

Susan J. Ellis
susan@energizeinc.com

Susan is president of Energize, Inc. and recognized internationally as a leader in the volunteer field. She served as Project Advisor as a volunteer, in addition to her capacity as the Documenting Consultant. See her “Author’s Bio” on page 99.

Steve Glikbarg
steve@glikbarg.com

Co-founder of Impact Online in 1994, and author of its popular "Internet 101" course for nonprofits, Steve was co-executive director of IOL during 1995 and remains on its board of directors. He was a key contributor to the initiation of IOL's Virtual Volunteering Project. He is a frequent speaker at conferences relating to nonprofits and the Internet. His previous work experience includes publishing *Who Cares* and helping put the magazine *Communication Arts* online.

Sarah Jane Rehnborg, Ph.D.
rehnborg@mail.utexas.edu

Director of the Center for Volunteerism and Community Engagement at The Charles A. Dana Center, a research unit at the University of Texas at Austin, Sarah Jane has devoted her career to the field of volunteerism and is published in the field. She is a former president of the Association for Volunteer Administration and a past recipient of that organization's Harriet Naylor Distinguished Member Service Award. Working with Leadership Network, Sarah Jane developed their guidebook for volunteer involvement in communities of faith. She has also written an award-winning curriculum in service-learning for high schools and middle schools in cooperation with the Volunteer and Youth Leadership and Training Project in Pittsburgh, PA.

Cindy Shove
CLShove@aol.com

Co-founder of Impact Online in 1994, Cindy was co-executive director of IOL in 1995, then executive director through the Spring of 1997, over-seeing its evolution into a leading online resource for volunteers and the agencies that need them. Cindy was a key force behind the initiation, funding and launch of the Virtual Volunteering Project. She consulted with America's Promise to build their Web site and is a frequent speaker at major conferences and regional events relating to nonprofits and the Internet.



Appendix B
Resources

One of the limitations of "freezing" this *Guidebook* in a published form—even if electronically—is that we know most of the references that follow may quickly be out of date. Therefore, since this *Guidebook* appears simultaneously on three active Web sites, we urge readers to access the most current information available at:

- **Energize, Inc.**: http://www.energizeinc.com

This site gives generic information on all aspects of volunteer program development and management.

- **Impact Online**: http://www.impactonline.org

Here you will find up-to-the-minute information about virtual volunteering opportunities.

- **Virtual Volunteering Project**: http://www.serviceleader.org/vv

This is where you will find all additions to the growing body of information on how to work with online volunteers. You are also invited to become a subscriber to the free electronic newsletter, VIRTUAL VERVE, which will keep you up to date on all virtual volunteering developments:

1. Send an e-mail from the e-mail address to which you want the newsletter sent to: listproc@mcfeeley.cc.utexas.edu

2. In the body of the e-mail, type:
   subscribe vverve YOURFIRSTNAME YOURLASTNAME
   [example: subscribe vverve Jane Doe]
   (The list processor, which is a computer, not a person, will reject requests that do not contain a first and last name.)

Online Resources for Volunteer Program Managers and Service Leaders

When the Virtual Volunteering Project first compiled this index in early 1997, the electronic resources on the subject of volunteerism easily fit on one page. Today there are so many resources online for volunteer managers that the index has been divided into the sections listed below. Access it all at: http://www.serviceleader.org/vv/vonline.html.

- Web sites on the subject of volunteer program management
- Online discussion groups for volunteer managers and volunteers
- USENET newswgroups, listservs and updates via e-mail for and by volunteer managers and service leaders
- Web sites listing volunteer opportunities
- Web sites promoting volunteerism and community service in general

Bibliography of Printed Materials on Volunteer Program Management

There are more than 200 books and periodicals focusing on volunteer program management. Here are some of the most-referenced works. Visit the Energize Web site <http://www.energizeinc.com> for more titles and other information, or call 1-800-395-9800 for Energize's free "Volunteer Energy Resource Catalog."

Campbell, Katherine Noyes and Susan J. Ellis. *The (Help!) I-Don't-Have-Enough-Time Guide to Volunteer Management*. Philadelphia: Energize, Inc., 1995.

Ellis, Susan J. *From the Top Down: The Executive Role in Volunteer Program Success*, revised edition. Philadelphia: Energize, Inc., 1996.

Ellis, Susan J. *The Volunteer Recruitment Book*, 2nd edition. Philadelphia: Energize, Inc., 1996.

Fisher, James C. and Kathleen M. Cole. *Leadership and Management of Volunteer Programs: A Guide for Volunteer Administrators*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1993.

Graff, Linda L. *Beyond Police Checks: The Definitive Volunteer & Employee Screening Guidebook*. Ontario: Graff and Associates, 1999.

Graff, Linda L. *By Definition: Policies for Volunteer Programs*. Etobicoke, Ontario: Volunteer Ontario, 1993.

Lee, Jarene Francis, with Julia M. Catagnus. *What We Learned (the Hard Way) about Supervising Volunteers: A Guide to Making Your Job Easier*. Philadelphia: Energize, Inc., 1999.

McCurley, Steve and Rick Lynch. *Volunteer Management: Mobilizing All the Resources of the Community*. Downer's Grove, IL: Heritage Arts Publishing, 1996.

Seidman, Anna and John Patterson. *Kidding Around? Be Serious! A Commitment to safe Service Opportunities for Young People*. Washington, DC: Nonprofit Risk management Center, 1996.

Tremper, Charles and Gwynne Koston. *No Surprises: Controlling Risks in Volunteer Programs*. Washington, DC: Nonprofit Risk management Center, 1993.

Scheier, Ivan H. *Building Staff/Volunteer Relations*. Philadelphia: Energize, Inc., 1993.

Vineyard, Sue. *Beyond Banquets, Plaques and Pins: Creative Ways to Recognize Volunteers and Staff!* Downer's Grove, IL: Heritage Arts Publishing, Revised 1994.

Netiquette Resources

***Note**: For the most current listings and links, go to the VV Web site:*
http://www.serviceleader.org/vv/findta.html

Glikbarg, Steve. "Outreach Netiquette—the Do's and Don'ts of Outreach."
http://www.impactonline.org/services/internet/out.html

Hambridge, Sally. "Netiquette Guidelines." Intel Corporation. (Includes an excellent bibliography for more information as well.)
http://www.dtcc.edu/cs/rfc1855.html

Shea, Virginia. *Netiquette*. Originally published by Albion Books, the online edition contains all the text and graphics from the bound book.
http://www.albion.com/netiquette/book/index.html

Resources about Virtual Technical Assistance

***Note**: For the most current listings and links, go to the VV Web site:*
http://www.serviceleader.org/vv/findta.html

Agre, Phil. Various publications about computing's impact on community and social practice.
http://dlis.gseis.ucla.edu/people/pagre

Christian Macintosh Users Group (CMUG). "How to Work with Volunteers in Desktop Publishing" (information for both volunteer managers and volunteers themselves).
http://www.cmug.org/H1/yp.workvolunteers.html

CompuMentor. Online handbook to prepare its mentors for what to expect in volunteer situations.
http://www.compumentor.org/cm/resources/mentor/default.html

NetDay (a national effort to wire schools). Guide on how to coordinate volunteers to "wire" a school for Internet access and networking, sample checklists and follow-up systems for organizers, volunteers, and partners—helpful to anyone coordinating technical assistance volunteers. http://www.netday.org

Additional Sources to Recruit Technical Assistance Volunteers

> ***Note**: For the most current listings and links, go to the VV Web site:* http://www.serviceleader.org/vv/findta.html

To find volunteers with a wide range of skills:

American Association of Retired Persons (AARP), http://www.aarp.org
AARP's motto is "To Serve, Not To Be Served." AARP has information centers staffed by volunteers to help older volunteers find and work on projects, as well as a volunteer talent bank for members to share their knowledge and abilities with others.

E-Corps, a project by the Beacon Project, http://www.beaconproject.org
Works to match volunteers with expertise in not-for-profit and business management with organizations that need their expertise. The volunteers provide most of their assistance via the Internet.

Executive Service Corps (ESC), http://www.escus.org
An association of retired business men and women who volunteer their time to consult with nonprofit and public service agencies. They believe that the experience and skills acquired during their business careers can help those agencies solve management, governance and administrative problems.

No Wonder, http://www.nowonder.com
Has volunteers ready to help anyone via e-mail with computer and software questions.

VolunteerMatch, http://www.volunteermatch.org
The primary service of Impact Online, VolunteerMatch allows you to request online volunteers with a specific area of expertise. There are many other places to register online volunteering opportunities as well.

Send specific volunteer opportunity announcements to your nearest volunteer center by postal mail or e-mail. Call your local United Way to see if they operate such a center, or go to http://www.serviceleader/vv/vonline2.html for links to lists of volunteer centers by state.

Another way to reach retired professionals is by sending an overview of volunteer opportunities to area senior citizens centers, university livelong learning programs, and local chapters of the Retired and Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP). A good place to find local chapters of these groups (besides your phone book) is via:
http://www.yahoo.com/Society_and_Culture/Cultures_and_Groups/Seniors/Organizations

To find volunteers with specific skills:

Accountants for the Public Interest,
http://www.accountingnet.com/asso/api

A national nonprofit organization encouraging accountants to volunteer their time and expertise to nonprofits, small business and individuals who need, but cannot afford, professional accounting services. The national office may be able to help you find someone to work with you online (or off-line, for that matter).

Business Volunteers for the Arts (BVA),
http://www.artswire.org/arts&business/bvahome.htm

Provides free management consulting assistance to arts groups by recruiting business professionals to volunteer their time.

Human resources: If you are looking for help with certain HR issues, send a volunteer opportunity announcement to the local chapter of the Society of Human Resource Management. Find a local chapter through the national site at http://www.shrm.org

Service Corps of Retired Executives (SCORE),
http://www.score.org

A resource partner with the U.S. Small Business Administration, SCORE is dedicated to aiding in the formation, growth and success of small businesses nationwide. SCORE offers e-mail counseling at no cost (for U.S. citizens and resident aliens only); its huge searchable databank helps users find the SCORE member whose expertise best addresses their business needs. The expertise of members is highly varied and specialized—you can get e-mail counseling in everything from tropical agriculture to unemployment compensation to wholesale lighting equipment. The Web site also has a database for finding local SCORE affiliates.

Note: For people outside the U.S., there's R.E.CO™ Retired Executive Consultants International, which matches middle management volunteers, engineer volunteers and any other retired entrepreneurs to effectively help small and medium-sized enterprises.

Web designers: An excellent place to look for Web designers is the Microsoft Site Builder Network – VolunteerKiosk,
http://www.guidestar.org/classifieds/ms_sbn.adp

A joint project with GuideStar to connect nonprofit organizations with Web developer and designer volunteers, the Microsoft Site Builder Network is a membership program and online resource that supports Web designers and developers with tools and information.

Disability-Related Online Resources

There is a vast amount of disability-related information on the Web. The following is not a comprehensive index. Instead, it's a starting place for those agencies seeking more information about disability-related issues in cyber-space, school and work environments, and assistive technology resources.

> ***Note**: For the most current listings and links, go to the VV Web site:*
> http://www.serviceleader.org/vv/findta.html

ADA Technical Assistance Program
http://www.icdi.wvu.edu/tech/ada.htm

A federally funded network of grantees which provides information, training, and technical assistance to businesses and agencies with duties and responsibilities under the ADA and to people with disabilities with rights under the ADA. Includes a list of Disability and business Technical Assistance Centers (DBTACs), which provide information and referral, technical assistance, public awareness, and training on all aspects of the ADA. The National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research (NIDRR) of the U.S. Department of Education funds the DBTACs and six National Training Projects (NTPs), which target particular groups, organizations, or subject areas for ADA training.

"Adults With Disabilities: Perceived Barriers that Prevent Internet Access."
http://www.dinf.org/csun_98/csun98_152.htm

Presented at the 1998 Conference: "Technology and Persons with Disabilities" by the Center on Disabilities at California State University at Northridge. You can find a complete list of papers presented at this conference at http://www.dinf.org/csun_98/csun98.htm

Agility Web's Community Service Information
http://agilityweb.com/csc

Provides information about local, national and international programs serving a variety of needs and offers free Web pages to not-for-profit community service organizations at no charge.

Assistive Technology Resources on the Web.
http://www.vewaa.org/internet/

A meta-index of sites compiled by the Vocational Evaluation and Work Adjustment Associations (VEWAA), a national non-profit professional association whose members work with people to match them with training, careers, and employment.

Closing the Gap Online Resource Library
http://www.closingthegap.com/library

An internationally recognized source for information on innovative applications of computer technology, particularly in special education and rehabilitation. This library includes outstanding information on using technology in curriculum development, particularly in helping students with disabilities excel, encouraging the inclusion of students with disabilities, or in helping to bring students with and without disabilities together in learning environments.

Disabilities Information Resources
http://www.dinf.org

Nonprofit organization that collects information on disabilities and disability-related subjects and makes it available through the World Wide Web. The information is designed for use by researchers, legislative bodies, people with disabilities, and people working in the disabilities field. Excellent, comprehensive resource.

Disabilities, Opportunities, Internetworking and Technology (DO-IT)
http://weber.u.washington.edu

Sponsored by a grant from the National Science Foundation and The University of Washington. Focuses on increasing the participation of individuals with disabilities in academic programs and careers. The project offers services for those with disabilities including college preparation and access, career planning resources and a variety of programs which support and encourage the use of technology to maximize the independence, productivity and participation of people with disabilities.

The Disability Social History Project
http://www.disabilityhistory.org

A nicely-crafted Web site featuring information about the history of the disability movement (including a creative timeline), famous personalities, and more.

Infinitec Inc.
http://www.infinitec.org

A U.S. nonprofit corporation to help people with disabilities, their families and their communities gain access to the full range of technology options at affordable cost. By enabling people with disabilities

to enjoy significantly enhanced, lifelong access to technology, Infinitec Inc. aims to promote a profound shift in the ways that people with disabilities, along with their families and neighbors, live and interact.

"Untangling the Web"
http://www.icdi.wvu.edu/others.htm

A comprehensive list of Disability-Related Web sites maintained by the West Virginia Rehabilitation Research & Training Center and funded by a grant from the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research. The site provides access to information, reading materials, support groups, legislation and legal assistance, software, educational programs and targeted resources for specific disabilities.

The Web Accessibility Initiative (WAI)
http://www.w3.org/WAI/

An activity sponsored by the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C). WAI's purpose is to make the Web more accessible to people with disabilities. The WAI has five major areas of work: technology, guidelines, tools, education and outreach, and research and development. W3C is jointly run by MIT Laboratory for Computer Science (LCS) in the USA, National Institute for Research in Computer Science and Control (INRIA) in France and Keio University in Japan. To date, more than 215 organizations are members.

World Association of Persons With Disabilities
http://www.wapd.org/links/index.html

Provides links to sources of advocacy, information, motivation assistance for the physically and mentally challenged through the use of advanced technology.

Youth Volunteer Corps provides two questionnaires to help you measure your own and your staff's views of people with disabilities: "Scale of Attitudes towards Disabled Persons" (SADP), and the "Disability Quotient Questionnaire," as well as exercises to encourage staff discussions. These worksheets are available by calling Youth Volunteer Corps at 913-864-4095.

Telecommuting Resources

***Note**: For the most current listings and links, go to the VV Web site:*
http://www.serviceleader.org/vv/findta.html

There is extensive information online about companies who have instituted successful telecommuting programs, allowing employees to work from home via the Internet, as well as guides on how to start a program at other organizations. The Virtual Volunteering Project team has found this

information of great help both in developing information for volunteer managers who want to start virtual volunteering programs, as well as for our own staff operations.

The resources we found most valuable were:

"Communication and Trust in Global Virtual Teams"
http://www.ascusc.org/jcmc/vol3/issue4/jarvenpaa.html

An in-depth academic study by Dr. Sirkka L. Jarvenpaa that "explores the challenges of creating and maintaining trust in a global virtual team," particularly those that involve people of different cultures and interest, and varying degrees of commitment.

"Establishing a Corporate Telecommuting Program:
http://www.auxillium.com/telecomu.htm

Part of "The HR Manager," an on-line reference guide to the broad range of Human Resources topics. It's produced by Auxillium West.

Gil Gordon Associates
http://www.gilgordon.com/hub2.htm

Consultant Gil Gordon provides excellent resources for managers of telecommuters, and many links to other telecommuting sites. Also featured are articles by Jack Nilles, known as the "Father of Telecommuting."

International Telework Association/Telecommuting Advisory Council
http://www.telecommute.org

This site is the home of TAC, a nonprofit organization dedicated to promoting the benefits of telecommuting, and the "Telecommute America Program," a nationwide public awareness, information and education program focusing on the benefits of telecommuting and nontraditional work environments including virtual office, work-at-home, satellite offices, and more. Contains a calendar of worldwide telecommuting events, a discussion group, a library of articles, and information on telecommuting organizations in many states.

Kelly, Bernie and Bruce McGraw. *Successful Management in the Virtual Office*

This outstanding, extensive guide, released May 10, 1995, is no longer available online. It used to be at:

http://www.clark.net/pub/kmcgraw/guide/telgd1.htm

Doing a search for this guide on search engines will lead you to some of its resources quoted in various articles and student papers. If you know of where this guide can now be found, please contact us.

Langhoff, June. "an Introduction to Telecommuting."
http://www.telecommute.org/june.html

An excerpt from Telecom Made Easy (Aegis, 1996).

Moskowitz, Robert. “Are You Ready To Telecommute? An Objective Checklist To Determine If Your Company And/Or You Are Ready For Telecommuting.” Published in MicroTimes magazine.

The Oregon Department of Energy
http://www.cbs.state.or.us/external/ooe
This site contains loads of information on Oregon’s telecommuting programs.

Pacific Bell Network Telecommuting Guide. Pacific Bell’s telecommuting program was one of the first in the national.

Activism Sites

***Note**: For the most current listings and links, go to the VV Web site:*
http://www.serviceleader.org/vv/findta.html

NetAction
http://www.netaction.org
A project of The Tides Center, NetAction is a nonprofit organization dedicated to promoting effective grassroots citizen action campaigns by creating coalitions that link activists using the Internet with grassroots organizations, and educating the public, policymakers, and the media about technology-based social and political issues. NetAction has lots of great advice for organizations looking into mobilizing activism via the Internet, including accounts of what's worked and what hasn't ’or various agencies. The site includes "Th“ Virtual Activist,” a comprehensive training course on cyber-activism to assist activists who want to use technology effectively for grassroots organizing, outreach, and advocacy. Information from NetAction regarding online activism is also featured in articles for Mother Jones Magazine, including “Is It Outreach, or Is It Spam?” and “NetAction’s Tools for Organizing Cyberspace.”

Institute for Global Communication
http://www.igc.org
Another organization with lots of experience and knowledge around Internet volunteer activism, including an outstanding list of links to activist tools and funding resources for organizations at http://www.igc.org:80/igc/issues/activis/or.html.

Case study: Constituency Organizing on the Net
http://www.ebase.org/case.html
During the summer of 1997, the Northern Rockies Campaign (NRC), with primary support provided by the Pew Charitable Trusts, initiated an aggressive strategy to influence the outcome of the Interior Columbia Basin Ecosystem Management Project (ICBEMP), an inter-agency

federal process that would dictate management of ¼ of all public lands in the United States for the next several decades. The organization initiated an e-mail campaign to re-engage citizens who had submitted public comments to ICBEMP. Read the step-by-step process that made this happen, to find lessons for your own organization.

EFF Activism and Government Archive
http://www.eff.org/pub/Activism
The electronic Frontier Foundation provides a long list of links to examples and articles about how citizens can pursue Net grassroots political activism.

Designing Effective Action Alerts for the Internet
http://weber.ucsd.edu/~pagre/alerts.html
This is a guide to designing political action alerts. It also suggests what kinds of badly designed action alerts you should refrain from forwarding to others. By Phil Agre of the Department of Communication, University of California, San Diego.

What's Working: Advocacy on the 'Net
http://www.benton.org/Practice/Best/advoc.html
A list of nonprofit advocacy organizations by the Benton Foundation, who make particularly good use of the Internet in their activities. Includes a summary of each organization's online efforts and a link to the organization's Web site.

20/20 Vision's Activist Toolkit
http://www.2020vision.org/tools.html
Includes "Using Cyberspace: Activism Online."

An Activists' Strategy for Using E-mail and the World Wide Web
http://www.onenw.org/toolkit
By One Northwest, an organization that helps environmental organizations in the northwest.

Alliance for Justice
http://www.afj.org/pubs.html
Online information on free and low-cost publications re: nonprofits, advocacy and the law. This national association of environmental, civil rights, mental health, women's, children's and consumer advocacy organizations offers updates on new federal laws and what they mean for nonprofits who want to engage in lobbyi8ng and advocacy (such as their Guide to the Lobbying Disclosure Act), reviews of basic tax and election laws which govern nonprofits and reviews of the right (and wrong) ways to organize specific voter education activities (voter registration, candidate questionnaires, voter guides, and candidate debates and forums), the legal do's and don'ts of participating in ballot initiative campaigns, a report that dispels the myths associated with

funding advocacy organizations and offers a full range of advocacy activities that foundations can support, and a review of the regulation of advocacy activities of nonprofits that receive federal grants.

The Community Activist Guide to the Internet
http://www.pressroom.com/~wabranty/caim.htm

This essay by William A. Brantley, Jr., a political consultant, describes how to use the Internet as a tool for organizing and activism.

Acting Up On Line: The Internet lets activists reach around the world at little cost
http://philanthropy.com/articles.dir/v10.dir/i12.dir/12advocacy.htm

An excellent article by the Chronicle of Philanthropy with examples of online activism and advice from people involved in these online campaigns.

New Voices in Cyberspace: Don't Whine, Go Online!
http://www.thenation.com/issue/0608/0608SHAP.htm

An article in The Nation.



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Web Link Index

Throughout *The Virtual Volunteering Guidebook*, you will find the following Web sites hot-linked. They are also hot-linked below. Click on a domain name to go its Web site. Or, for more information, refer to their respective pages in the *Guidebook.*

http://www.

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aarp.org *115*
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