

MANAGING VIRTUAL VOLUNTEERS

IN 2021 AND BEYOND



INTRODUCTION

The world has been shifting toward virtual engagement for some time. This shift was accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, which forced organizations to adapt their traditionally in-person volunteer roles to virtual ones. It is likely that your organization has already implemented virtual volunteer opportunities. Now it is time to focus on volunteer engagement and retention for virtual roles. We've zeroed in on several key principles and strategies to keep in mind as you deploy effective virtual volunteering and manage virtual volunteers.

GET CREATIVE

While the process of modifying engagement strategies may seem daunting, one way to support volunteer engagement is to offer a variety of flexible roles and time frames for a wider and more diverse selection for volunteers. Remember to remain sensitive to the fact that their needs and current situations are as important as the organization's missions. Organizations can also create opportunities for digital training courses specifically catered to those who are technologically marginalized. This demonstrates your understanding and empathy to their needs in addition to practicing inclusivity within your organization.



COMMUNICATE REGULARLY

It is important to keep volunteers engaged! The best way to cultivate efficient and dedicated volunteers is to communicate regularly with them. You can start by keeping in touch with each volunteer. Ask them how they are, how they are enjoying their positions, and if they have any feedback. This shows them that you care about them and their opinions. It is also important to offer frequent updates about the organization and emphasize that your volunteers are making a positive impact. When volunteers are actively involved, they will have a more positive volunteer experience, a stronger connection with the organization and its mission, and are more likely to continue contributing their time and effort to the organization.

FOSTER STRONG RELATIONSHIPS

Many of us are looking to connect more than ever before. While in-person relationships are important, it is equally as vital to build online communities amongst your volunteers and offer opportunities for them to connect with other volunteers on your team. You can start by creating online meeting spaces that are accessible and engaging. Take extra steps to build trust and create opportunities for teams to grow naturally. Consider setting up a "buddy system". Pair a new volunteer with an existing one to encourage support, regular check-ins, and cultivate social interactions between your volunteers. Another idea is to set up a virtual space for your volunteers to "hang out", such as a Facebook group or a weekly Zoom call. This will give your volunteers an opportunity to get to know each other and ask each other questions without having to be in person.

Just try volunteering once and you won't be able to stop.

Shonu Ghosh
Volunteer55 Ambassador





WORK TOGETHER

Nearly everyone has had to shift the way they live and work over the past year, and that undoubtedly comes with challenges. Remember that we are all learning and trying our best! Your volunteers, like you, are experiencing uncertainty through change and it is important to understand that people learn and adapt at different paces. The key is to listen, understand, engage, and respond! Develop a virtual program that welcomes feedback and that is conducive to productive conversation and improvement. Be open to observations and reflections from your volunteers. You can start by surveying volunteers to see how you can better support them. You can ask questions such as:

- How can the virtual program or opportunity be better?
- What would you change about the organization's use of technology in engagement and recruitment?
- How satisfied are you with your virtual volunteer experience?

The more transparent you are, the more comfortable your volunteers will be. Being able to work together as a team can ultimately guide your virtual programs and volunteers' success moving forward!

Volunteering for me is fulfilling. It gives me routine and keeps me socially, intellectually, and physically active.

Dennis La Hue
Volunteer55 Ambassador

USE SOCIAL MEDIA



Being active on social media enhances engagement both with the general public and your volunteers. Consider your social media presence as part of your volunteer engagement plan. Share your social media channels with your volunteers and ask them to engage as part of their role.

Here are some tips for using social media:

1. Be actively involved. You aren't going to reach your followers or gain new followers by posting once a month. It is best to post 3-4 times a week, and only once a day.
2. Use hashtags! Hashtags group your post with other posts that are using that hashtag. So, if you use #VolunteerOpportunity, those who are looking for a volunteer opportunity may go to that hashtag and scroll through the posts. Additionally, good hashtags to use are your location, such as #CentralOkanagan. This groups your post with others in the Central Okanagan so that you reach an audience that is relevant to you.
3. Monitor your followers and following. Pay attention to what your followers are up to, and follow similar organizations to your own to see how they do things. Follow other organizations in the community. This is a great chance for partnerships and relationship building.
4. Use links when possible. When you are making a post it is usually with the intention to direct your followers to your website or to an event. If you tell people "visit our website" but don't have your website easily accessible, people won't visit it.
5. Use photos and videos. The type of content you are sharing matters. People respond to other people, so don't only post graphics or text.
6. Show your personality! You want to show your followers not only your organization, but the people that make it unique!

SHOW APPRECIATION AND DON'T FORGET TO CELEBRATE

Volunteer recognition and appreciation is vital to the success and retention of your volunteers. Be timely and consistent with your recognition, whether it be a big or small contribution. In a survey by Volunteer Canada, 80% of volunteers indicated that they would like to be recognized by hearing about how they have made an impact, and 70% would like to receive recognition by being thanked on an ongoing basis. 'Thank you' are two of the most powerful words in your toolkit but, expressing gratitude can be shown in various other ways. It does not have to be elaborate or costly. Instead, try to maintain the 'human touch' and have a physical card, note, or a token sent to their home address. Some may even spotlight a volunteer story in an organization's weekly newsletter. Think outside the box, the more unique and personally catered the recognition, the more meaningful it will be to your volunteers!



REFERENCES & RESOURCES

[Okanagan Volunteer Fair](#)

[Overview of Volunteer Management by KCR Community Resources](#)

[Thankq.us](#)

[The VolunteerConnector](#)

[Track it Forward](#)

[2013 Volunteer Recognition Study by Volunteer Canada](#)