Jayne Cravens presents:
Virtual Volunteering: Now, It’s Essential (& still oh-so-personal)

Learn the basics of what you need to do to rapidly increase your program's use of Internet tools to support and engage online/remote volunteers - virtual volunteering - and how to use this experience to permanently incorporate the use of the Internet in engaging all volunteers. The focus will be on working with what you already have (volunteers who have previously undertaken tasks for your program, policies and procedures, etc.) and adapting such to substantially expand your online engagement and keep all of your volunteers involved in meaningful, worthwhile ways. You will also learn why, in fact, there are no "virtual volunteers."
All of today’s materials...

As well as support materials for further learning:

www.coyotebroad.com/pointsoflight20/
Virtual Volunteering: Now, It’s Essential

Why Listen to Jayne?

- I’ve been involving online volunteers, volunteering online & promoting virtual volunteering since the mid 1990s (before I knew it had a name).
- I read & research re: volunteer/community engagement, talent management, communications, and anything that might be related to such.
- I ran the Virtual Volunteering Project at the University of Texas and the Online Volunteering service at the United Nations, and wrote *The LAST Virtual Volunteering Guidebook*
- I frequently consulted and collaborated with Susan Ellis / Energize, Inc.
- I continue to maintain the Virtual Volunteering Wiki.

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How I define volunteers:

Volunteers are people who undertake tasks for your program but are not paid.
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& virtual volunteering?

It’s using the Internet & networked devices to support & engage volunteers.
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Virtual Volunteering Roles & Tasks

- translating text (& proofreading work by others)
- designing web sites or publications
- editing or writing proposals, press releases, articles, video scripts, blogs, etc.
- developing material for a curriculum
- designing a database
- designing graphics
- monitoring the news
- monitoring Quora, Reddit, other online communities
- providing legal, business, medical, agricultural, financial or any other expertise (answering questions, creating a strategy, commenting on a strategy, reviewing or evaluating data, etc.)
- counselling people
- tutoring or mentoring
- Having an online home visit with someone or a group of people elsewhere
- moderating or facilitating online discussion groups or live online events
- populating a database with information
- editing a video
- captioning a video or transcribing a podcast
- put in short descriptions of images on a web site or community
- transcribing scanned documents
- tagging photos and files with keywords
- managing other online volunteers
Virtual volunteering roles can...

- Be short-term.
- Be long-term.
- Be a micro-task.
- Be an in-depth task.
- Require very little in terms of skills or experience.
- Require a great deal in terms of skills or experience.
- Be in support only of staff, with no interaction with clients or the public.
- Be in support directly to clients or the public.
- Require real-time interactions.
- Never require real-time interactions

- Be done by individual volunteers who never work together.
- Be done by groups working together who know each already.
- Be done by groups working together who have never met before.
- Be limited to only those volunteers who also come onsite at your organization.
- Focused specifically on recruiting people missing among your usual volunteers (teens, university students, people that are a part of a particular community, geographically remote volunteers, etc.)
- Be done by those who also volunteer online.

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Already Engaging Volunteers Online?

- You communicate with volunteers via email (back & forth, not just one-way/from you to them, with questions, advice, feedback, discussion, etc.).
- You have Zoom, Skype, WebEx, MS Teams, Google Hangouts or other online video calls with volunteers.
- You have an online discussion group for volunteers.
- You have a way for volunteers to report in via the Internet.
- Volunteers can email each other, for whatever reason.
- Volunteers do some service at home (emailing each other, translating text, researching something, writing an article for your newsletter, etc.) **Girl Scouts example**
Keep in mind:

- There are NO “virtual volunteers.” **All volunteers are real.**
- Volunteers think of themselves as **volunteers** – not **onsite** volunteers or **online** volunteers.
- No need to ever say the word "virtual volunteering" or "microvolunteering" or “evolunteering” - volunteers just want to VOLUNTEER. They respond to the program’s mission and the task (type of work, amount of time needed, etc.). They want to HELP.
- This is as profoundly PERSONAL as you make it.
- This is about humans, not tech.
Also keep in mind:

- Virtual volunteering is more than 35 years old. It’s not new.
- Virtual volunteering is established practice; it is not cutting-edge, it is not untried, thousands of programs have done it and are doing it.
- Virtual volunteering is well-researched (See the Virtual Volunteering Wiki and The Last Virtual Volunteering Guidebook).
- Virtual volunteering is probably happening right now at your program, even if you say it’s not.
- There shouldn’t be workshops on virtual volunteering (no more segregation of this practice!).
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Why Virtual Volunteering?

- Volunteers expect and demand it.
- Gives current volunteers more way to help.
- Invites new volunteers who see this as a preferred way to help.
- Could welcome back previous volunteers whose circumstances changed (new baby, home care issues, etc.).
- Can help add diversity to your volunteer ranks (people who have home care obligations, people who work a second or third shift, people with disabilities – but only if you have welcoming, accessible online materials, etc.).
- Can bring in more talent and expertise your program needs.
- Online volunteers may also become onsite volunteers.
- To not do it means you lose out on so, so much.
- New reason: keep volunteers engaged during stay-at-home orders amid a global pandemic.
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Keys to success in vv:

- Creating an abundance of diverse roles and activities.
- Supporting volunteers, and supporting those engaging with online volunteers.
- Adhering to Volunteer Management 101 guidelines re: quality support & management.
- Always showing – to volunteers, to employees, to your board, to the public – why volunteer contributions matter.

These are VASTLY more important than ANYTHING else, including TECH and RECRUITMENT.

And they are the keys to success for ALL volunteering.
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What is support for volunteers?

- Opportunities (roles & tasks) that are easy for potential volunteers to review & apply for.
- Expectations of the volunteer are in writing and clear to everyone.
- Expectations of the organization regarding volunteers are in writing clear to everyone.
- Tasks are detailed and well-communicated.
- Questions are welcomed, responses are rapid.
- Volunteer contributions are tracked and recognized.
- Volunteers see their contributions make impact.

NOTE: this is for ALL volunteers, online or onsite.
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For immediate vv roles & assignments

- Recruit from your current, vetted, experienced volunteers.
- Also ask them what they might want to do to support your organization from home (they may have great ideas).
- Also ask staff for assignment ideas (ask the trick question!)
- Your current polices and procedures, if they are writing and well-communicated (available online for anytime reference), should be fine already to support these immediate roles & assignments.
- If you don’t already have a volunteer tracking system, you can use Google Docs to track what assignments are available, what have been assigned, progress on assignments, etc.

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Immediate vv roles & assignments

- translating text (& proofreading work by others)
- editing or writing proposals, press releases, articles, video scripts, blogs, etc.
- monitoring the news
- monitoring Quora, Reddit, other online communities
- retweeting & sharing your Facebook posts
- providing legal, business, medical, agricultural, financial or any other expertise (answering questions, creating a strategy, commenting on a strategy, reviewing or evaluating data, etc.
- Getting your volunteer application, volunteer policies, etc. on your web site
- editing a video or podcast
- captioning a video or transcribing a podcast
- put in short descriptions of images on a web site or community (improves accessibility)
- transcribing scanned documents
- tagging photos and files with keywords
- making a Twitter lists so that it’s easier to follow elected officials, or similar organizations, or other programs in your area, via social media
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What tools I use (with ALL volunteers):

- Email.
- The program’s web site.
- Online discussion group for “my” volunteers (I like groups.io, but others use Google Groups because it’s free; I don’t use Facebook groups with volunteers).
- Google Docs to track what assignments are available, what have been assigned, progress on assignments, etc.
- If someone else is paying for it: Basecamp or Slack.
- YouTube (for training videos).
- Skype or Zoom or WebEx or whatever the program wants me to use.
- With all that said: YOU DO YOU
Next steps (1)

- Review your policies and procedures, update them as appropriate (especially re: safety, confidentiality and sexual harassment), put policies online so that volunteers can access them ANY TIME.

- Think about how you mass-communicate with your volunteers. Should that just be email or should you start an online group for volunteers? (I strongly vote the latter)

- Communicate to your volunteers where to find your policies and procedures, consider having a zoom call (recorded for those that can’t be there – or record such on YouTube) reviewing key points and changes.

- Try volunteering online yourself (see link on web page; lots of micro tasks you can do).

- Launch some online roles and assignments for volunteers to support YOU, specifically, as manager of volunteers, and recruit for help first among current volunteers.

- Ask staff: “Do you have text you need translated? Do you have YouTube Videos and are they CORRECTLY captioned? Etc.” If they say yes, offer to recruit volunteers for them to do this.
Next steps (2)

- You have your volunteer application online and it can be submitted electronically, RIGHT?!?
- How will volunteers check in with you? (I just use email)
- Keep track of roles and assignments. As noted before: if you don’t already have a volunteer tracking system, you can use Google Docs to track what assignments are available, what have been assigned, progress on assignments, etc.
When are you ready for new volunteers?

- If you’ve done all the aforementioned preparedness, you are ready for new online volunteers.
- Do you need to meet with each one via video or is submitting your online application and having some back and forth via email enough for you? You have to decide that. What I do….
- Think how you will onboard new volunteers: Will you have them join your online group for volunteers before they begin or only after they “prove” themselves by completing one assignment (and you know they are “for real”)? How will you communicate your polices and procedures?
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Screening

- “How do I make sure an online volunteer isn't a bad person?” The same way you do so with an onsite volunteer.
- Seeing someone face-to-face, onsite, is not a screening tool.
- Different roles require different screening.
- Email exchanges show if someone can write well & is responsive. Video conferencing shows if someone speaks well. LinkedIn shows a person’s work record. A reference check confirms skills and capacities. A criminal background check identifies arrests and convictions that a volunteer might not have revealed. Which would a beach cleanup need to do? Which would a graphic design volunteer need to undergo? Which would someone interacting one-on-one with an elderly person need to undergo?
Confidentiality

● “How do we ensure volunteers will keep things confidential?!” Paying someone doesn’t make them more trustworthy – so, how do you make sure STAFF will keep things confidential? (it’s all about TRAINING ON PROCEDURES and COMMUNICATION).

● Doing training onsite, in-person does not guarantee someone will adhere to confidentiality rules.

● Beach cleanups don’t do trainings on confidentiality. Which volunteer roles need this training? YOU decide.
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Safety & Confidentiality

● Should it be a requirement the volunteer have a password-protected computer or smart phone?

● Should the volunteer be advised to never use a public wi-fi network, even with a VPN? (at an airport, at a coffee shop, at the library, etc.).

● Should the volunteer be advised regarding what should be showing in the background on a video call?

The answers to these questions have to come from you & are based on what volunteers will be doing.
Be Explicit

- What would a violation of confidentiality look like, online AND offline?
- What would a violation of safety policies look like, online AND offline?
- What would a violation of policies regarding sexual harassment look like, online AND offline?
- What exactly should someone do if they observe a violation of any of the above?
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More complex roles & assignments

- counselling people
- tutoring or mentoring
- having an online home visit with someone or a group of people elsewhere
- designing web sites or publications
- moderating or facilitating online discussion groups or live online events
- transcribing scanned documents
- developing material for a curriculum
- designing a database
- managing other online volunteers
Transitioning programs offline to online

Already have volunteers counseling people face-to-face, tutoring or mentoring others face-to-face, making home visits with people face-to-face, etc.?:

- Look at your current policies. Do they already cover confidentiality, privacy and safety? Permitted and prohibited online activities? Harassment and complaints process?
- Should volunteers be required to have a password-protected computer or smart phone?
- Should volunteers be advised to never use a public wi-fi network, even with a VPN? (at an airport, at a coffee shop, at the library, etc.).
- Should the volunteer be advised regarding what should be showing in the background on a video call?
- Will volunteers use their own email or Zoom account or do you need to develop an entire, private platform of your own?
Next steps for complex vv roles & activities

- All of the next steps re: less complex virtual volunteering, including looking at your current policies & procedures.
- Use *The Last Virtual Volunteering Guidebook* and the Virtual Volunteering Wiki to adjust your policies and to find existing programs that are similar to what you want to do (“news” section is a good place to look).
- Look for a somewhat similar program where you can participate as an online volunteer yourself.
- Use these resources and experience to create a custom strategy to launch your own program.
- Keep in mind ACCESSIBILITY (accessible online design)
- Process will NOT be rapid.
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The LAST Virtual Volunteering Guidebook

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Recruiting new volunteers?

- Recruiting new volunteers easy. Recruiting a diversity of volunteers can be easy.
- If you don’t follow all the other recommendations I’ve made re: policies, describing assignments in writing, screening, etc., your recruitment will fail.
- There are recommendations regarding recruitment on the web page associated with this presentation (URL at the end of this presentation).
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Talking success

- Number of volunteers engaged each year & the # of hours they give?
- Having enough volunteers for all the roles reserved for volunteers?
- Percentage of volunteers that stay (retention)?
- Money saved (unpaid staff)?
- Lack of complaints?

Or is it something more?
Measuring success

- How volunteer activities directly impact the program mission
- How volunteers talk about the program to others
- Innovations & connections volunteers bring to the program
- How volunteers are affected by their service
- How people that volunteers work with are affected by their service
- How volunteers feel about their service
- How well volunteer engagement reaches a diversity of volunteers
- How employees feel about volunteers and their service
- The rate of satisfaction volunteers have about program support
- Revelations regarding challenges and problems, so they can be addressed
- Conflict that is addressed and lead to better understandings
- And, yes, # of volunteers engaged each year, the # of hours they give, having enough volunteers, & % of volunteers that stay (retention)
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Remember: volunteers can help!

- Current volunteers can tell you what they want to do as online volunteers.
- A volunteer can do all the *initial* screening of new volunteers for you.
- Volunteers can research social media policies, confidentiality policies and online safety policies, compiling them for your review.
- A volunteer can do web page development your web master doesn’t have time for.
- A volunteer can find the appropriate Facebook groups, subReddits and other online communities you want to target for recruitment of new volunteers.
- A volunteer can compile all of the email addresses for groups and faculty at nearby universities or other nonprofits you want to contact.
- Veteran, experienced volunteers can help moderate your online community for volunteers, reading EVERY message and letting you know about messages that need your attention.
- A volunteer can create the script for your video to train new volunteers.
- On and on and on...
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More resources

www.coyotebroad.com/pointsoflight20

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