**Managing Virtual Volunteering During the Corona Pandemic**

**What is virtual volunteering?**

Full or partial performance of volunteer tasks from home via the internet by using a computer or smartphone (Ellis & Cravens, 2014)

**In light of the current situation, many organizations are shifting their volunteer activity to online virtual channels.**

**What does this mean? How can it best be done?**

**We are here to help!**

**Especially now – Volunteer!**

1. **Designing Virtual Roles**

**The following table outlines two primary options:**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Creating new virtual roles** | **Transforming a routine role into a virtual role** |  |
| Creating new roles volunteers can perform virtually | Adapting regular volunteer activity into a virtual role | Option |
| Given the current situation, with many people at home and looking for meaningful ways to spend their time, there is an opportunity to enlist their assistance and special skills in a variety of non-routine tasks that can help the organization advance its goals | To maintain the organization’s functional continuity as well as contact with beneficiaries and provision of services, volunteers can be assisted in performing at least some elements of their role using online platforms | Impact and meaning |
| * Translation of documents * Data mining and location of information and articles * Writing articles, blogs or website posts * Writing position papers * Statistical data analysis * Management of online focus groups * Constructing training protocols * Writing briefings and procedures * Assisting organization beneficiaries with online shopping * Assisting organization beneficiaries who are in quarantine with workshops or stress relief via online channels | * **Mentoring** – online instead of face-to-face sessions and meetings * **House calls** – replace weekly home visits with phone calls or online chats daily or multiple times per day * **Group meetings** – workshops, training sessions and support groups can be held via Zoom | **Examples** |

**In both cases it is important to remember:**

People’s attention span for tasks performed on the computer or phone tends to be limited. At the same time, when performing volunteer tasks from home, the boundaries between regular home activities and volunteering may become blurred. People may find themselves "sucked into" an increasing number of volunteering tasks. Therefore, it is important to observe these ground rules:

* Formulate a clearly **written role definition** for volunteers, outlining the tasks to be performed via online platforms.
* Ensure that **suitable technological tools** for performing new tasks are available, convenient, accessible, and familiar platforms that do not require complex volunteer training (Skype, Zoom, or WhatsApp).
* Define the **role** **and specific tasks,** each lasting relatively short periods of time. Priority should be given to individual tasks not exceeding half an hour and virtual meetings of up to one hour.
* Advocate volunteers **working in shifts** in order to maintain the framework, timetables, and obligations. Volunteers will be asked to make themselves available for a specific time to perform each task.

1. **Volunteer - Task Compatibility**

Change is not easy for anyone at any time. It is especially difficult in this period of uncertainty. It is important to make ensure that the adapted role is suitable for the volunteers, they have the knowledge and tools required for the adapted or new role being offered to them, and they are not suffering from anxiety regarding using the necessary technology. A written role-description clearly outlining short and specific tasks will help reduce anxieties!

1. **Training for Virtual Volunteering: Highlights**

Prior to the introduction of each adapted or new role, volunteers should receive training that will enable them to fulfill it. It is recommended to use an online platform for such training.

**Training highlights to be considered:**

* Provide a detailed description of the role, expectations, and its special attributes as compared to the routine role.
* Training in the use of technological tools to be used in online volunteer tasks.
* Review the sensitive issues involved in adapting face-to-face modes of communication into phone or online communication.
* Provide tools for handling technical difficulties during a phone or online conversation.
* Raise volunteers' awareness of specific and special needs beneficiaries might have due to the circumstances of the Coronavirus pandemic. Train volunteers in asking the relevant questions to assess beneficiaries’ needs. Ensure that volunteers know who they should report these needs to.

1. **Management and Supervision of Virtual Volunteering**

The greatest challenge of virtual volunteering is maintaining regular contact with the volunteers from a distance. Below are tips for management and supervision of these relationships:

* **Create an interactive online workspace and meeting space for the volunteers.** If volunteers cannot arrive at the office or community center, create an online platform to enable them to continue meeting, sharing experiences, and consulting with each other. These may include a closed Facebook group or a Google Classroom.
* **Provide technical support.** It is important to offer volunteers technical support in using the new platforms they are being asked to use. It is recommended to have on call technologically savvy volunteers who can provide support to others in these new endeavors.
* **Beginning and ending shifts.** When operating in shifts, it is recommended to begin and end each shift with a briefing via video conference. You may discuss expectations, and what has been done in previous shifts. This creates a framework for the activity and maintains contact.
* **Manage the ongoing communication.** To avoid an unmanageable surge of telephone calls and WhatsApp messages, it is important to structure the ongoing communication. Schedule a weekly online group conversation or a weekly phone call with each volunteer. Notify volunteers of the communication processes and expected times. Consider a platform that will be convenient for volunteers to report their activities. These can be created with basic tools such as Google forms/questionnaires, joint documentation, and Excel files.
* **Take interest in the safety and welfare of the volunteers.** Offer volunteers daily or weekly online sessions to express their concerns. Volunteers are also in a stressful situation. It is essential to check how they are doing and how they are coping.
* **Offering online support and benefits.** Remember to mark birthdays, births, and other happy occasions. Convey to volunteers your appreciation for what they are doing and the impact they make. Send messages of thanks and support, such as specially designed WhatsApp stickers.

**Relevant Technological Tools**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Tool Name** | **Key Functions** | **Link to the Tool** | **Link to Tool Training Tutorial** |
| **Skype** | Remote calls of up to 50 people that enable participants to see and hear one another and to share screens and files. | <https://www.skype.com/he/features/calling-and-instant-messaging/> | <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SW2D1EPLSXE> |
| **Zoom** | The free Zoom account enables unlimited calls between two people and calls of up to 40 minutes among up to 100 people. | <https://zoom.us/> | <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IeMiho1VORg> |
| **Google Classroom** | Virtual space for group meetings that enable educators to upload materials in an orderly fashion and hold active conversations. | <https://edu.google.com/intl/iw/products/classroom/?modal_active=none> | <https://ecat.education.gov.il/google-classroom> |
| **Facebook Group** | Closed Facebook groups enable simple, convenient, and natural communication among large numbers of volunteers. | <https://www.facebook.com/> | <https://he-il.facebook.com/help/167970719931213?helpref=about_content> |
| **Google Forms** | Free and simple creation of surveys and forms. | <https://www.google.com/intl/iw_il/forms/about/> | <https://www.google.com/intl/iw_il/forms/about/> |

**Contact us!**

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**If you have additional ideas or remote-management tools to share, please contact Tamar:**

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