

Volunteering in a Virtual World

Project Title:	RDP067: Volunteering in a Virtual World - Phases 1 & 2		
Delivered by:	PAVO		
Start date:	08/10/2018	End Date:	31/08/2021
LEADER Theme:	Theme 5 - Exploitation of Digital Technology		

Total Expenditure:	£75,644.92
RDP Funding:	£60,492.42
Match funding:	£15,152.50

1. Introduction

Online volunteering is any volunteering that is done via the internet, on a computer or smartphone, from the volunteer's home or anywhere else they get online. Online volunteering offers many benefits for both volunteers and voluntary organisations, especially in rural areas.

2. Challenge

The concept of volunteering via the internet is as old as the internet itself. Surveys and engagement exercises with volunteers in Powys found widespread interest in online volunteering, most citing the flexibility and possibility of volunteering without having to travel great distances. However, at the start of the project only a very small number of online volunteering opportunities were being offered by Powys organisations. Phase 1 of the project set out to address this challenge by engaging both organisations and volunteers in realising the potential of online volunteering in Powys.

During the course of the project a broader challenge was identified in that many third sector groups in Powys need support with digital skills for their trustees, staff and volunteers. There is widespread recognition across the UK that a large proportion of the third sector is getting left behind in terms of online and digital working. Organisations which don't have digital skills and confidence miss out on opportunities, one of which is access to the potential of online volunteers. The onset of the Covid-19 pandemic brought this sharply into focus as many, especially smaller, groups found themselves unable to deliver their services or even function as an organisation within the restrictions of lockdown. Phase 2 of the project offered support to help them overcome this.

3. Solution

Phase 1 of the project worked with a small group of voluntary organisations in Powys to help them to pilot opportunities for online volunteers. The project officer worked with each group to identify volunteer roles which could be carried out remotely and to create volunteer role descriptions. The officer also helped the organisations to look in detail at their volunteering policies and processes to adapt them for working with online volunteers where appropriate. In

some cases, the opportunities identified were part of new digital services and so support was given to set these up. The new volunteering opportunities were advertised through the all-Wales volunteering platform Volunteering Wales. Work was also carried out to promote the benefits and opportunities of online volunteering more widely, including the establishment of an online hub for volunteers to find opportunities.

Phase 2 of the project established a digital support service for third sector organisations struggling to operate during lockdown. Support was offered in a number of ways: through a direct advice and signposting service, through online workshops and training, and through a pool of volunteer 'Digital Mentors' who could support organisations to work on an area of their digital skills.

4. Benefit

Volunteers are able to share their skills remotely - without having to travel, and flexibly – at times to suit their lifestyle. This is beneficial in 'normal' times, especially in a rural county such as Powys, but has been especially important during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Third sector organisations are better able to take advantage of the opportunities that digital technology offers. These can include more access to funding, access to skills outside their local area, the ability to deliver their services more efficiently and to offer their services more widely. At the most basic level, organisations are able use technology to continue operating during times of national lockdown.

5. Result

Through the medium of the internet, groups involved in Phase 1 were able to find volunteers both from within and without Powys to help them, for example, set up a new website, design posters for events, and facilitate an online befriending group. Many more volunteers and voluntary organisations in Powys are now aware of the volunteering opportunities offered online.

Organisation supported in phase 2 were able to learn how to operate remotely during lockdown, holding online AGMs and increasing their online presence. Digital mentors have helped organisations to use technology more effectively when staff and volunteers are working from home, and helped them to plan how they might embed digital practices in the longer term.



6. Project Outputs/Outcomes

Output (Case Level Indicator)	Achieved
No. of feasibility studies	1
No. of networks established	0
No. of jobs safeguarded	0.7
No. Of pilot activities undertaken / supported	5
No. of community hubs created	0
No. of stakeholders engaged	148
No. of participants supported (awareness raising events only)	211
No. of jobs created	1
No. of communities benefitting	0
No. of businesses benefitting	0

7. Project Contact Details

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8. Partners/Match Funders Logos

PAVO

Powys Association of Voluntary Organisations
Cymdeithas Mudiadau Gwirfoddol Powys

