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TECHNOLOGY

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## EDITORIAL

Technology - embrace or fear it - is here to stay. The exponential growth in this industry challenges even the most tech-savvy manager of volunteers. We at CJVRM have embraced the lure of technology and are excited to announce the creation of our own website. Please see "Items of Interest" on the last page of this issue for our new web address and more details!

In "Technology and the Voluntary Sector", Jane Zhang defines three important areas to consider when implementing technology into your organization, and asks you to decide what you want technology to do for you. Are you ready for its impact?

Nicole Poos emphasizes the need for large, non-profit organizations such as the Canadian Breast Cancer Foundation to use information technology (IT) to stay current, keep growing, and engage and expand their vital volunteer base.

If you were to enroll in a course to improve your skills, what kind of learner would you be? How would you begin? "E-training – is it a solution for your organization's training needs" by Judi Angel and Maggie Leithead from Charity Village Campus offers helpful insights and tips.

Do not turn away volunteers with disabilities. This advice comes from Kim Kilpatrick, who says technology is available to assist these volunteers and fully integrate them into your organization.

Despite the pros and cons of various forms of technology for communicating with volunteers, Kim Lytle's "Virtual Volunteers-Lessons Learned" philosophy remains positive, emphasizing the importance of regular communication, showing recognition, team building and face-to-face contact with volunteers.

Giving women with difficult personal circumstances hope for the future is the valiant focus of iSisters Technology Mentoring, profiled in the article, "iSisters Bridges the Digital Divide" by Fran Harding. Fran highlights the successes of "...programs [which] aim to help women learn about technology, explore career options, gain self-esteem..." and so much more.

Beth Cougler Blom provides excellent examples of how technology connects volunteers, helps with information-sharing and updates and attracts tech-savvy volunteers, all with these online tools: blogs, wikis, survey tools, meeting schedulers and more.

The "Peer Expert", Lian Ellis, gives our readers very helpful dos and don'ts of electronic communication with a specific focus on email.

Technology is simply a tool that has made our lives easier in many respects, but ironically, also more complex. We hope this issue will help you understand its impact and give you insight so you can decide for yourself.

Jennifer Campbell  
CJVRM Editorial Team

# TECHNOLOGY AND THE VOLUNTARY SECTOR

by Jane Zhang

**Information Technology:** *Electronic equipment that stores, sends, retrieves, or manages information. This includes computers, phones, networks, electronic databases, wireless devices, PDAs and the Internet.*

This definition of Information Technology (IT) is not really correct. In order to talk about technology and its role in the voluntary sector, we need to first NOT talk about technology.

If we look at how IT is being used within an organization, it is about how organizations connect, collaborate, communicate, advocate, partner, discuss, share with each other and with the communities they serve. Ultimately, technology exists to help organizations achieve their strategic missions.

The mission or mandate is what organizations want to change in the world and the strategies to help them affect social change result in the different programs and services they provide and the activities they execute. The success indicators of their programs and services are often dependent on the operations of the organization. So how can technology help organizations in the different levels? Some questions organizations may want to ask are:

- Does technology enable us to achieve our mission in a new way and can it actually become a part of our strategy? For example, should we use an online wiki for member organizations to share volunteer recruitment success stories if it is core to our mission?
- Can technology help us to implement some part of our strategy? Can technology allow better management of volunteers, help us fundraise and plan events?
- Can technology automate repetitive, non-value-added tasks? Is it cheaper in the long run to do these tasks electronically? For example, automatically capturing volunteer registration online instead of keeping paper records of volunteer applications in a folder.

If organizations can answer the above questions and deploy technology in a strategic way, they would have the potential to:

- streamline and simplify their volunteer recruitment strategies;
- affect policy change or raise awareness about an issue through online advocacy campaigns;
- increase program funding through grant tracking databases;
- promote programs and services through online marketing and outreach efforts; and
- lower operating costs by going virtual and collaborating online.

## Trends in technology today

### *Web 2.0*

The emergence of Web 2.0 strategies and tools, such as blogging, tagging, Flickr and Google AdSense, has increased the ability for organizations to communicate their message, interact with their audience and build online communities. Voluntary sector organizations have traditionally been one-directional in the utilization of the web as a communications tool. The implementation of Web 2.0 tools and strategies will continue to foster improved communication between agencies and the communities which they serve.

### *Open-Source Applications*

The past few years have seen open-source applications gaining popularity in the voluntary sector. Many organizations find the principles behind open source consistent with their own mandate. Open-source applications are freely available and do not require licensing fees, reducing the cost needed to implement technology projects. Although there is growing popularity in open-source applications, the cost of customization and maintenance must be considered.

### *Online Communities*

Due to the availability of Web 2.0 strategies and tools, the building of online communities is becoming an avenue for knowledge exchange, collaboration and outreach for voluntary sector organizations. The ability to organize and collaborate online has empowered many rural communities to overcome their physical isolation. Organizations, however, are still facing the challenge of a lack of expertise to build and maintain the infrastructure needed for online communities.

### *Social Networking Applications*

Facebook, MySpace and other social networking applications share similarities with the voluntary sector in that they all emphasize the importance of relationships. Not-for-profit organizations can leverage the experience they have in building relationships to use these tools to help maintain relationships with those they serve.

## Getting Started with Technology

Even with an understanding of how technology can support their strategic mission, organizations still face the challenge of implementing successful technology projects. Successful technology projects require a clearly defined scope, the proper resources available and a plan for sustainability in the long run.

### *Step One: Define your needs*

Before embarking on a technology project, organizations should perform a needs assessment to determine their current state and identify gaps in order to achieve their goal. It is important to keep in mind that these are human, financial and hard-resource needs that will enable the implementation of a strategic mission. The needs assessment examines the following:

1. Technology Infrastructure Needs (computer software and hardware)
2. Technology Skills Needs (IT staff, volunteers, consultants)
3. Technology Implementation Needs (budget, time)
4. Non-technology Related Needs (buy-in from staff, capacity for staff or volunteer to generate content needed)

#### *Step Two: Build on existing resources*

By leveraging existing resources, not-for-profit organizations have the opportunity to maximize their available project budget and focus on filling in the missing pieces. These resources can be non-fiscal assets such as a board member with a technical background, access to free hosting, availability of internships and volunteers. When making a decision about which platform to use for web projects, for example, organizations should take into consideration the web platform and database type that exists on the organization's server. In addition, software and hardware donations programs such as Techsoup Stock and Reboot can drastically lower the cost of IT infrastructure for organizations.

#### *Step Three: Driving from A to B*

Managing a technology project is much like driving a car. The organization does not have to understand the ins and outs of technology, but they should have a clear idea of what they want the technology to do. Given time and resource restrictions, organizations should also be wary of taking on too much. Breaking down a large project into phases and small sub-projects will give time for organizations to properly adapt to the technology. Documenting the technology project can help with knowledge management. Technology is only the tool, and what the voluntary sector really needs is technology expertise. This would require financial and HR commitment from the organizations, support from the funders and sustained commitment from technology volunteers.

*Jane Zhang is Program Manager at Techsoup Canada, a Trillium funded project aimed at making technology accessible to the nonprofit sector through the Techsoup Stock Donations Program, Partnership Platform Project and other capacity building initiatives. In addition to her work at Techsoup Canada, Jane is currently the Director of Corporate Social Responsibility for the Information Technology Association of Canada (ITAC), where she works to promote volunteerism and corporate social responsibility for the ICT (Information and Communications Technologies) sector. Jane has been an active participant in the Toronto technology community, helping to organize technology events such as DrupalCamp, Women in IT, and Software Freedom Day.*

## **VOLUNTEER E-GAGEMENT: UTILIZING INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY EFFECTIVELY TO MANAGE VOLUNTEER RESOURCES**

by Nicole Poos

In order for not-for-profit organizations to maintain their competitive edge in the current marketplace they must work towards utilizing the most current information technology (IT) in all aspects of their business practices. As managers of volunteer resources (MVRs), our roles are now changing and there is a greater need to work in a way that integrates IT to meet the organization's volunteer management requirements. In this way, the Canadian Breast Cancer Foundation is continually working towards integrating IT to facilitate the electronic engagement of its volunteers: volunteer e-gagement. At the Foundation, volunteer e-gagement is a strategy to increase efficiency and improve productivity by developing and utilizing various IT resources and tools throughout the volunteer management cycle.

Initially, the Foundation's e-gagement philosophy was focused on making the volunteer registration experience fast and easy for its signature fundraising event, the Canadian Breast Cancer Foundation CIBC Run for the Cure. The starting point of the new strategy was the development of a fully interactive website that allowed volunteers to register online for the Run. This led to a greater focus on e-gagement and the development of a new database tool called the online volunteer module (OVM). The OVM worked in two distinct ways. Firstly, on the front end, it provided potential volunteers with the opportunity to register online. Secondly, on the back end, it provided users (i.e. coordinators of volunteers) with a way to execute a variety of volunteer management functions (e.g. to search, match, assign positions, and to communicate with volunteers).

The OVM tool initially was devised to fill an integral business need for the Foundation to facilitate standardized volunteer management practices within a group of unpaid coordinators of volunteers (VCs) who were geographically separated in 55 local communities across Canada. The challenge for the Foundation was two-fold: how to manage the volunteer registration process centrally and how to facilitate the volunteer management practices locally through its VCs.

The first business solution was achieved through the OVM's front-end registration system which enabled potential volunteers to register online for the Run with support provided from staff both centrally and regionally. All volunteers would have the same volunteer registration experience and all VCs were encouraged to direct potential volunteers to the website to gather more information about volunteering for the Run.

The second business solution was achieved by developing the back end of the system, which was called the administrative application. The administrative application functioned as a database that could be accessed by users (i.e. VCs) remotely via the Internet to perform all of the traditional volunteer management

practices through an electronic application. The OVM signified a paradigm shift away from the traditional VC role that involved an offline process with paper application forms, telephone communication and person-to-person interaction towards a modern VC role that evolved into an online process with an electronic database and email communication with volunteers.

The development of the OVM tool required a paradigm shift in the Foundation's organizational culture as well. Through this project, staff are no longer solely responsible for their own specific area of expertise or department and now contribute to a cross-functional project team approach. This enables staff members to provide input in a variety of projects that have an impact on the Foundation's overall business goals. This global perspective reiterates the Foundation's overall goal to fully integrate IT and exemplifies how e-gagement has the ability to connect all stakeholders from donors to participants to volunteers.

The next challenge for MVRs is to bridge the digital divide with stakeholders by working on new issues such as usability, accessibility and reliability of the e-gagement strategy. To aid MVRs with this new competency, a new IT role was developed for a highly-skilled volunteer to provide professional IT expertise. This volunteer would improve the OVM's quality (i.e. increase its functionality and reliability) and create a professional mechanism to solicit user feedback for further enhancements to the OVM tool.

While undertaking a volunteer e-gagement strategy, numerous insights were gathered on how to improve the overall quality of volunteer management at the Run. Initially, the goal of integrating IT with the volunteer resources department was to increase the capacity for volunteers in the field by providing them with new IT tools, which would increase volunteer recruitment and provide a standardized way to manage volunteers. While this goal was accomplished, a number of challenges did surface along the three-year development of the OVM project at the Foundation. The OVM learning could be divided into three areas of organizational readiness:

1. Adequate resources – the size and scope of an IT project requires a large outlay of both financial and human resources. It is important to ensure that all of your stakeholders understand that the first phase of the project will have increased investment of time and resources, which will translate into increased productivity and added efficiency in the future.
2. Effective training – implement a thorough training program based on sound educational methodologies including various types of training (i.e. in-person, web & teleconference training, and e-learning options) and develop a variety of training tools including manuals and training aids. Do not hesitate to consult with professionals. The Foundation consulted with

the not-for-profit organization, Partnership Platform, to assist in reviewing the OVM software and training needs.

3. Ongoing information sharing – all of your key stakeholders need to be consulted in the primary requirements gathering phase of your IT project plan. A thorough feedback and evaluation process should be integrated into your IT plan and it is crucial that this feedback is utilized to further refine and enhance your IT tools. Volunteers were essential in the process of adapting the OVM tool to meet their needs in the field.

Today, utilizing IT effectively is essential to organizations like the Canadian Breast Cancer Foundation, in order to meet its growing revenue goals through the active support of a large volunteer base. In order for the Foundation to dedicate more money towards finding a cure for breast cancer, it must undertake an integrated IT strategy to increase volunteer e-gagement. Volunteer e-gagement can be challenging but MVRs must find new and innovative ways to use IT to increase the effectiveness of their volunteer resources department in order to remain competitive in the new technological landscape.

*This article is a condensed version of a certification paper written by Nicole Poos for CAVR. Nicole Poos is the Manager of Volunteer Resources at the Canadian Breast Cancer Foundation, Central Office. For more information please visit the Foundation's website at: [www.cbcf.org](http://www.cbcf.org)*

## **E-TRAINING - IS IT A SOLUTION FOR YOUR ORGANIZATION'S TRAINING NEEDS?**

by Judi Angel and Maggie Leithead

*E-training – you have heard about it. What is it? What are the pros and cons of different types of online training for you, your staff or your volunteers?*

As a manager of volunteers, you are familiar with how training can empower people to do a better job and gain greater job satisfaction. You are also likely aware of the many barriers people face in accessing the training they need and want. Online or e-training may not be the “magic pill” solution for all your training needs but the growing number of options for this type of learning may make it an increasingly attractive option for you and your team.

Not only are many online offerings less expensive than in-person courses, your organization will be able to save on travel costs. People will spend less time away from their everyday responsibilities and will be able to put their new skills to use more quickly.

## Types of e-training

There are two main types of e-training which we detail below: self-directed and collaborative. Both types deliver the broad benefits of online learning versus traditional classroom or workshop learning.

- **Self-directed:** Learners are in full control, interacting with the course material at their own pace and on their own time schedule. Software allows students to engage with materials through self-tests, scenarios, worksheets and/or other downloadable resources, not just by reading text. Self-directed training is the most common type of online learning and, often, the most affordable.

- o **Examples:**

- Self-paced courses over the Internet
- CD/DVD courses
- Courses on film/video

- o **Key benefits:**

- Learners can adapt the training exactly to their needs so that they can skip areas where they already have a solid understanding and delve more deeply into those areas where they need more information.
- Learners can complete course materials at the time and pace that suits them best.
- Course options range from broadly focused to very narrowly focused. A growing range of subjects is offered by course developers.

- o **Drawbacks:**

- If there is no outside accountability for course progress, your inner procrastinator might appear.
- There is limited or no interaction with other learners or an instructor, so there may be little opportunity to ask questions.

- o **Best fit for:**

- Self-motivated learners who do not require much interaction with others to learn.
- On-demand learners who need to learn practical skill-building and key concepts in a short timeframe.

- **Collaborative:** Learners learn with and from other people. Sometimes this learning is done in real-time; other times, it is asynchronous.

- o **Real-time examples:**

- “Webinar” that begins at 10 a.m.
- Monthly conference call

- Weekly virtual classroom session with an instructor and other learners
- o **Asynchronous examples:**

- Message boards or discussion forums where multiple people participate but not all at the same time.

- o **Key benefits:**

- Learners can share ideas, approaches and questions with each other.
- Learners have more opportunity for individual instructor feedback.
- Learners are able to network and build relationships with each other.

- o **Drawbacks:**

- Less flexible time scheduling
- Often more costly
- Targeted at group learning needs, rather than individual skill gaps

- o **Best fit for:**

- People who learn best while interacting with other people.
- Learners who need the accountability of a regularly scheduled meeting time.

Some e-training programs offer a blended combination of traditional instruction with self-paced elements. For example, learners may meet in a virtual classroom for discussion but complete course web modules independently.

### What is right for me and my team?

At the end of this article, we have included several self-assessment questions to help determine which type of program is the right fit for you. With a basic understanding of each training style, we hope that you will be able to evaluate more effectively the growing number of e-training options and make the right choices for you and your team.

QUESTION	Self-Paced	Collaborative
Is it important for me to interact with other learners? Do I learn better when I have people with whom I can bounce around ideas?		✓
Do I find it easier to learn when I am alone without the distraction of other people around?	✓	
Is it important for me to interact with the instructor or course writer?		✓

QUESTION	Self-Paced	Collaborative
Am I a self-motivated learner who does not procrastinate much?	✓	
Do I need to learn something quickly and put it to use immediately?	✓	
Do I have some level of knowledge in the subject already and just need to “top-up” my learning?	✓	
Do I feel frustrated having to wait for other learners to catch up?	✓	
Am I very price-sensitive when it comes to paying for training?	✓	

This has been a brief overview of the pros and cons of various e-training options available to you and your team. If you have any questions about this subject feel free to contact either of the authors at [judi@charityvillage.com](mailto:judi@charityvillage.com) or [maggie@charityvillage.com](mailto:maggie@charityvillage.com).

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## TECHNOLOGY ENABLES PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES TO VOLUNTEER

by Kim Kilpatrick

As we all know, the increasing development of technology has dramatically changed and will continue to change the way we work and volunteer. When I was in elementary and high school, there were no computers, scanners or printers that embossed information in Braille. I have been totally blind since birth and learned to type, by touch, in grade three in order to hand in assignments. I could not proofread them, however, which led to some interesting instances of typewriter ribbons running out in the middle of an essay or exam. I had to get readers to read information and do research for me. These documents were read onto tape and transcribed by me into Braille.

Today, I work for Volunteer Ottawa coordinating a program which assists people with physical and sensory disabilities to find volunteer work and also assists non-profit organizations in welcoming people with disabilities. My technology helps me every day.

I use what is called screen-reading software. This speaks to me, telling me what is on my computer screen. It allows me to e-mail, write, edit and print documents, use spread sheets and surf the Internet as anyone else would. In the past, software packages for screen reading have been very expensive. Unfortunately, not everyone who is blind has one. Also, very few nonprofit organizations are able to afford the purchase of screen-reading software. Several months ago, some software was launched which vastly improved the access to the Internet for any blind person using a computer with a sound card. Best of all, this product is free. It can be used to read e-mail, spread sheets, word documents and to use the Internet. If you go to [www.satogo.com](http://www.satogo.com) you can try it out. I use it most of the time and find it works well and is easy to use. It also has some screen magnification benefits. Screen magnification software is used by people who have partial vision to magnify the print on the computer screen.

I also use a standard scanner to scan and read printed materials although I mostly get people to send me printed materials as attachments by e-mail whenever possible. Some people with disabilities which make it difficult for them to write also use compact and readily available digital recorders to record information, meetings, etc. Other commercially available software, which involves voice recognition, can be useful for people who are not able to use their hands to type. Dragon Naturally Speaking is an example of this type of product. Some other devices and products that might assist people with disabilities are one handed keyboards (for people who can only use one hand) and adapted mice for those who cannot use the traditional computer mouse.

People who are deaf are finding that text messaging with cell phones or Blackberries can assist them even with face-to-face communication (it is faster and easier than handwriting a note to someone who does not know sign language). They can also communicate by e-mail, video phones and web cameras. Bell Canada has a service called Bell Relay which is also free and allows you to communicate by phone with someone who is deaf. To find out more go to: [www.bell.ca/specialneeds/PrsSN\\_SvcRelay.page](http://www.bell.ca/specialneeds/PrsSN_SvcRelay.page).

Here are a few questions for managers of volunteers to ask when welcoming volunteers with disabilities:

- What technology does the volunteer use and how is it used? If you do not have this technology, there are often easy and inexpensive solutions. These might include the volunteer bringing his/her own technology or having them volunteer from home or an alternate location.
- Is your web site fully accessible? To read more, check out the Web Accessibility Initiative at: [www.w3.org/WAI](http://www.w3.org/WAI).
- Are all of your documents (application and other forms, training materials, etc.) available in alternative formats including MS Word or text? Note that some PDF documents are difficult for people who use screen reading software to read.

When recruiting, plan to recruit volunteers with disabilities. These highly skilled, motivated and dedicated volunteers are a valuable and underused resource. Through Volunteer Ottawa's program, almost 100 volunteers with disabilities have been placed in the Ottawa community over the past two and a half years.

*Kim Kilpatrick is the Coordinator of Volunteers with Disabilities at Volunteer Ottawa. She is a graduate of Algonquin College's Management of Volunteer Resources Program and is an avid storyteller and Coordinator of Volunteers with the Ottawa Storytellers Festival. Kim welcomes questions or comments at [kim@volunteerottawa.ca](mailto:kim@volunteerottawa.ca).*

## VIRTUAL VOLUNTEERS - LESSONS LEARNED

by Kim Lytle

In the fall of 2004, the prospect of creating a website for children to learn about kidneys was too enticing to pass up. What a perfect opportunity to involve volunteers from outside my catchment area.

The goal for the site was to educate children aged six to sixteen about the kidney. These goals set the stage for identifying terms of reference for this group and the type of volunteers required to work on the project. Terms of reference and position descriptions were written to identify roles and responsibilities.

A medical professional was required to vet all necessary medical information. Adults affected by kidney disease, including an adult who had kidney difficulties as a child, were also recruited.

The last crucial piece was to have volunteers with web site development experience. I posted an on-line request at the local university and the volunteer centre. The response was beyond expectation, with six highly qualified individuals eager to participate. We were set to go!

By definition, virtual volunteers "conduct their activities for agencies and clients over the Internet, in whole or in part."<sup>i</sup> In our case, members lived in three different provinces. Funds did not allow bringing everyone together for an initial meeting, so a teleconference call was established. Prior to the meeting, a brief biography of each member was distributed via email.

Project information, including copies of minutes and important files, was housed in our "virtual office" via our Yahoo Group. Having one virtual storing house was essential to this experience.

The meeting opened with an initial orientation to our organization, building on the materials distributed once a member agreed to participate. The position description and terms of reference were reviewed to confirm with the volunteers that these accurately reflected their role and the role of the group. The group established initial action items and the meeting ended.

The scope of this paper is not to describe every detail of the function of the Kidney Kids Website Working Group; rather it is to analyze the process. I will review highlights of how the group functions as it pertains to the management of volunteers.

After our initial teleconference meeting, important insights were made. It is vital that a group working together for a specific purpose "bond" and form a team, and this is done by chatting with other members to identify common interests, understand personal situations and discover subtle nuances and personalities



before, during and after in-person meetings. No relationships were developed because talking by teleconference does not allow this. There is no “face to the name”. The group never posted pictures of themselves for the others to see. This may seem trivial but it is part of our human nature to connect with visual images.

Before, during and after in-person meetings there are many opportunities to visit with other members to identify common interests, discuss personal situations and discover subtle nuances and personality characteristics. With a teleconference, there is neither time nor mechanism to develop relationships through “idle chit-chat”.

It is not only the volunteers who miss out on all of the advantages listed above; so does the chair, the facilitator or manager of volunteer resources. I never realized how much I relied on body language and personal contact to connect with my volunteers. Though I communicated numerous times with each of them, by phone and email, I missed the intuitive feelings I relied on in other settings, such as reading the individual and group dynamics, being able to build a unique rapport with each person and knowing many details about the person.

A teleconference is typically very structured, adhering closely to the agenda. There is no way to have a sidebar! Everyone hears all comments, which may lead those leaning towards dissent to remain silent as opposed to reading another members’ body language and gaining courage to speak out. Dominant personalities can monopolize the conversation and influence the decisions made. This can lead to resentment on the part of the “quieter” members.

This type of communication may also make commitment to the cause less deeply entrenched as no initial in-person contact occurs. It is very easy to resign over the phone or via email if you have never even met the chair. The facilitator of the event “must make incentives both obvious and valuable to increase and maintain participants’ motivation. Participants must see the information and interaction provided via these events as valuable. Some groups emphasize a sense of responsibility in members -- participation is part of their volunteer commitment -- to maintain participation in such events.”<sup>ii</sup>

It is essential for the teleconference call to have a strong, intuitive chair to steer the meeting to ensure that everyone contribute equally, feel heard and feel appreciated. Constant questioning of each member for input into each decision is critical.

The next method of communication attempted was a free web-chat meeting. This seemed like a great idea as there were no related meeting costs; the adage, “what sounds too good to be true probably is”, proved correct!

Jayne Cravens with Coyote Communications defines web-chat as the following:

“A chat or instant message is simply a “live” text-based conversation: a participant types a comment or question and it is [usually] immediately available for another person, or a group of people, to review; other participants respond, and these comments are immediately available for review as well ... The culture of chat is fast, with short comments coming in quickly and constant ... Sometimes, however, people write thoughts they might not say in-person.”<sup>iii</sup>

“Usually” immediately available is added as currently there is a variety of Internet speeds, from the slow, but universally accessible dial-up connection to the newest broadband high-speed Internet. Should participants have a variety of internet speeds, the responses will post at different times, leaving those at the mercy of slow connections behind in the conversation.

One positive feature of web-chat is that there is a text record of the entire meeting, should it be copied and saved. It was interesting to go back and evaluate the comments and interactions.

Domination of the conversation by two participants can be frustrating for the others. Perhaps in a more traditional meeting format, issues arising from this situation can be dealt with in a more timely fashion.

Lastly, I would not recommend web-chat for a meeting with a formal agenda. The usefulness of a chat is to quickly communicate with multiple people on a short-term basis. An email on high alert would suffice if speed was a concern and a phone call to everyone was not feasible.

The only close substitute for a traditional, in-person meeting is to have a teleconference call or videoconference. Many people do not have a web-camera so they are not able to portray their image to others. As the technology evolves, a meeting via videoconference over the web-cam will be preferable to a teleconference call.

“VoIP” stands for Voice over Internet Protocol and is a technology that allows users to make phone calls over the internet, often for much less money than a traditional phone call ... Video conferencing is a phone call, via the phone lines or internet service provider that allows all participants with a web-cam and the necessary software to see each other during the call.<sup>iv</sup>

Video conferencing will help decrease travel costs substantially, once rapport has been built between members.

What would I do differently next time? Here are some important points to consider, below.

### **Communicate**

First I would try to meet all my volunteers. The need for written contact is even greater than with traditional volunteer positions. Time on the phone must be dedicated to building a solid, personal relationship with each individual volunteer.

### **Team Build**

A step that I missed doing with the group was traditional team-building activities. We jumped right into business with no time given to those goofy games that make people laugh and bond. Somehow, human interactions and relationship enhancement must be built into every meeting and interaction.

### **Show appreciation**

Traditional forms of recognition are still applicable to virtual volunteers. The need to “think outside the box” in terms of recognition is daunting but important. Perhaps instead of taking one out for coffee, a kind hand-written note with a Tim Horton’s coupon could be sent after a phone call. It never hurts to ask volunteers, “How would you like to be recognized and appreciated? What brings you the greatest joy in this task?” The questions themselves show care and concern. Just ensure that at least some of the suggestions are followed through!

How did this project turn out? The website was successfully completed, though the degree of volunteer engagement and contribution was not as great as it could have been. The remaining volunteers did not stay with the organization as they were recruited for a specific task and did not wish to continue in another capacity. Another virtual volunteering task in the form of a group project has not presented itself, though I would not hesitate to contact these volunteers again should the need arise.

In closing, I would like to say that this experience taught me much about managing volunteers. I can never assume I “know it all”. Each situation demands research and careful consideration. Further, I must not forget that the basic fundamentals of volunteer management apply in every situation and cannot be neglected.

### **End Notes:**

i Cravens, J. “Virtual volunteering: Online volunteers providing assistance to human services”. *Journal of Human Services*, 17(2000): 119-136.

ii Cravens, J. (2006), *Using Real-Time Communications (VoIP, Chat, Instant Messaging, Etc.) With Volunteers*.

[www.coyotecomunications.com/culture/chat.html](http://www.coyotecomunications.com/culture/chat.html) .

iii Ibid

iv Ibid

### *Reference*

Murray, V. & Harrison, Y. *Virtual volunteering. Current Status and Future Prospects*. Canadian Centre for Philanthropy, 4.

*Kim Lytle has worked in the voluntary sector for over ten years, managing volunteers for most of that time. She is Manager, Provincial Programs for The Kidney Foundation of Canada Saskatchewan Branch. When not at work Kim enjoys spending time at home on the acreage with her family and assorted creatures.*

## **iSISTERS BRIDGES THE DIGITAL DIVIDE**

by Fran Harding

The lack of computer skills is a key barrier to achieving economic independence in the 21st century. For those without access to technology, or the ability to use it, school, employment and financial independence are nearly out of the question. For women living in poverty, it can mean a lifetime sentence of economic hardship.

In 2001, a group of four young women teachers in Ottawa recognized this problem. They decided that they would dedicate their volunteer time to provide access to technology, to develop and deliver technology mentoring programs and to help women in need to enhance their career opportunities through technological awareness. Within a week they were working with a teacher at St. Mary’s Home developing a training program for pregnant teens there.

iSisters Technology Mentoring was born.

*“Thank you so much for coming to our school and helping us to understand the programs on the computer. You were a great joy to look forward to on Mondays. I have learned some great things. Thank you.”*

*Learner Robin*

iSisters soon became a Canadian charitable organization with a volunteer Board of Directors. Under the leadership of Executive Director, Cathy Lewis, it began building community-based technology learning centres and designing customized learning programs in partnership with agencies serving women in need.

Since then, three-year partnerships to deliver learning programs have been built with Tungasuvvingat Inuit Community Centre, Big Brothers Big Sisters Ottawa, Youville Centre, Immigrant Women Services Ottawa and Cornerstone Shelter and Housing for Women. With donated equipment – computers, software, office furniture – and financial support from various sponsors, as well as a small complement of volunteers, iSisters is able to provide training at no cost to the partners or the learners.

The learners are women who use the services of the partnering agencies. They are unemployed and generally range in age from 15 to 40. These women, usually mothers, often rely on government services and support for their basic needs.

*“iSisters has supported the creation of Tungasuvvingat Inuit’s Employment Learning Centre and they continue to guide us in teaching technology skills to the Ottawa Inuit community. We are very grateful for iSisters’ expertise and especially to Cathy Lewis for her wisdom and caring.”*

*Mary Hands, Employment Counsellor, Tungasuvvingat Inuit*

Each program is designed in collaboration with the partner and customized for the specific learning needs of the target group. The groups may include single mothers trying to finish high school, immigrant women who have escaped violence (often well-educated but with little or no experience with computers) or homeless women attempting to find housing, job information or how to access government services.

While each program is unique, all programs aim to help women learn about technology, explore career options, encourage life-long learning, gain self-esteem and improve earning potential and economic independence. Typical programs include an introduction to computer basics, email, safe use of the Internet, web research, word processing, spreadsheets and resume preparation. Beyond the fundamentals, however, programs are tailored to the language and social and educational needs of the participants. The customization of the programs and the involvement of community volunteers (often with personal experiences similar to the students) have contributed to the success of both the programs and the learners. More than 95 per cent of the students have completed the courses.

Since the birth of iSisters more than 600 women in the Ottawa area have graduated from the various programs. There will be many more. iSisters currently has ten new agencies in the queue hoping to form partnerships. Furthermore, this service is assured because the agreements between iSisters and partner agencies include the necessary training and support to build the

capacity for the agency to continue the program at the end of three years. The Youville Centre is already running its own programs with minimal on-going support from iSisters.

*“With this program our residents will have the ability to gain skills that are essential in attaining employment in the community and truly give them the ability to become self-sufficient. We are excited to have this program and are honoured by all the funders’ commitment and support to educate and empower women in need, give them hope for financial independence, and ultimately build stronger communities.”*

*Sue Garvey, Executive Director, Cornerstone Shelter and Housing for Women*

Key to the sustainability of iSisters mentoring is the development of “iTeachology”, an online version of the award-winning Employment Support Technology Mentoring Program. iTeachology will provide program partners and learners with experience learning independently online and offer access to all the customized materials and learning resources, independent of iSisters.

iSisters Technology Mentoring has won numerous awards, including The United Way/Centraide Ottawa’s Community Capacity Building award, the Conference Board of Canada’s Community Learning Award, and the Information Technology Association of Canada (Ontario) award for the Voluntary Sector.

*Fran Harding and her family have been dedicated volunteers of iSisters since its inception. Fran, a retiree, supports iSisters in many ways from event planning to communications expertise while her husband, John, and son, Malcolm, provide technical support and lab set up, free of charge, through their family business Compu-Home. For more information about iSisters go to [www.iSisters.org](http://www.iSisters.org)*

## **ONLINE TOOLS: THERE WHEN YOU NEED THEM**

by Beth Cougler Blom

The heavy workload of the manager of volunteers is a “given” in the not-for-profit sector. There is often not enough time in the day to do all the things that need to be done. Technological tools, especially online ones, could help some managers of volunteers with information dissemination and workload issues. Here are some tools currently available online for use within our volunteer departments.

### **Blogs**

A blog is an easily-updateable website that you create to provide mostly one-sided communication to your volunteers, your members or to the general public (or whomever you decide your audience will be) on a regular basis. A blog consists of individual “posts” of information which are usually fairly

conversational in tone. Think of blogging as similar to journaling, except you are doing it online with a much wider readership! Because you can set up a blog with one or more authors, maintaining your volunteer department's blog could be an ideal cyber-volunteer position. Blogging in an interesting way about your program activities (adhering to privacy and confidentiality policies of course) would be a great way to entice new Internet-savvy volunteers to join your team. You could also use a blog as an online newsletter for your current volunteers. Insert pictures to enhance your posts – just be sure to get your subjects' permissions first.

Some popular blog hosting sites freely available are Blogger ([www.blogger.com](http://www.blogger.com)), LiveJournal ([www.livejournal.com](http://www.livejournal.com)) and WordPress ([www.wordpress.org](http://www.wordpress.org)). There are also sites that you can use for a fee. Before you set up a blog it is important to consider a few key things. What will be its main purpose? How often do you intend to post to it, and what will you post about? How will your audience find your blog? Remember, your blog is accessible to everyone on the Internet so craft the information you post to it wisely. Update it weekly or bi-weekly at the very least; a blog with months-old information on it will soon not be read by any audience at all, let alone your intended one.

### **Wikis**

Probably the most famous example of a wiki on the Internet today is the online encyclopaedia Wikipedia ([www.wikipedia.org](http://www.wikipedia.org)). Wikipedia is a very large example of a wiki – an Internet site that is maintained by multiple collaborators, each having the authority to change information on the site. Wikis can be used by groups of people to share information and documents with each other and are ideal in cases where the users are not located in the same physical or geographical area. Wikis could be used within volunteer teams to share often-repeated or often-updated information. A free site to use to set up your own wiki can be found at [www.pbwiki.com](http://www.pbwiki.com).

### **Survey tools**

If you carry out surveys on a frequent basis or need to design one that is very large, it may be advantageous for you to use an online survey tool such as Survey Monkey ([www.surveymonkey.com](http://www.surveymonkey.com)) or Zoomerang ([www.zoomerang.com](http://www.zoomerang.com)). Survey Monkey has both free and fee sides to it depending on the size of your survey and is very user-friendly. Using online survey tools is a wonderful thing when your respondents are in different physical locations, when you would like to guarantee your respondents' anonymity, or when you would like to be able to collate and print out the information easily in a report format once the survey has closed.

### **Meeting schedulers**

There are some online meeting schedulers worth looking at if coordinating

meetings or receiving RSVPs to your events are becoming a chore. Meetup ([www.meetup.com](http://www.meetup.com)) is a fee-based site that can be used to plan events for which you would like attendees to RSVP (once you already have the date fixed). The site keeps track of your group's members and sends them reminder emails as the event date nears. Or, do you need to find the best time to hold your meetings? A free meeting scheduler can be found at [www.meetingwizard.com](http://www.meetingwizard.com). As it advertises, "put an end to email and telephone tag"!

### **Recognition gifts**

Searching for unique recognition gifts for your volunteers? Browse the thousands of online shops available within Etsy ([www.etsy.com](http://www.etsy.com)) for handmade items like cards, clothing, jewellery and much more. Many shops are happy to fill custom orders.

### **Conclusion**

The online tools above are meant to help you enhance your programs, stay organized and save time. Some will find that you can use some or all of them very effectively within your workplaces to help manage your volunteers and your workload. Others may find that you are simply better off leaving the technological solutions aside. Whether you are ready for them now or not, these online tools are there when you need them – whatever works for you and your particular situation.

*Beth Cougler Blom is currently on maternity leave from her position as Training & Outreach Coordinator at Volunteer Victoria, in Victoria, BC.*

## **MEDIA REVIEW: WUFOO**

by Susan Cheeseman

The Internet has become such an integral part of volunteer recruitment at Settlement and Integration Services Organization (SISO) in Hamilton that we recently upgraded our online volunteer application process with an HTML form-builder service.

### **Wufoo!**

Wufoo, [www.wufoo.com](http://www.wufoo.com), is a tool that allows you to easily make professional and user-friendly forms. You just sign up, name the form and start building your questions. We found that Wufoo offered a lot of choice in question formats: short answer, multiple choice and drop-down boxes among others. Our first attempt turned out to be very long when printed, but we changed some of the multiple-choice questions to drop-down boxes and then discovered a great function, the right half/left half function. Right half/left half allows the user to have two columns of questions, saving so much paper space. Mind you, what we did find was that the right and left sides are not always lined up evenly with each

other. This was our only complaint. We used a lot of section breaks to try to keep the form as neat looking as possible while utilizing both sides of the page.

### **Inexpensive!**

The first three forms are free! If you need more than three forms there is a small monthly maintenance cost dependent on the number of forms.

### **Easy!**

No longer do we email word documents to potential volunteers which often resulted in documents returned with “mangled” formatting; simply email the link. It even completes your reminders with the automated email reply options, such as sending the potential volunteer information about registering for the orientation or information about when to expect a reply.

Wufoo is an IT forms professional for those of us who do not have the knowledge or resources to write formatting code ourselves. However, this does not mean that you can use this site if you are not computer literate. You still need for example, to be able to link pages. All in all, it gets top marks from this user for simplicity, professionalism and low cost.

*Susan Cheeseman is Coordinator, Volunteer Services at SISO, Settlement and Integration Services Organization in Hamilton, Ontario*

## **MEDIA REVIEW : NAVIGATING NEW WEB TOOLS : WHAT IS 2.0?**

by Celina Agaton

The functionality of the web has changed in recent years, with enhanced user participation, information sharing and creativity and collaboration fostering local and international online communities. Many non-profits and social activists have embraced these new technologies and partnered with the technology sector to create tools that help address the time and budget limitations of the non-profit sector, while embracing the new openness of the web.

These new web tools, sometimes referred to as Web 2.0 tools or social media to reflect the new functionality of the web, are not meant to replace traditional ways of building community, but have been adapted to reflect the needs of the participant by diversifying the ways people can contribute to their community. The response across community sectors has been positive as organizations continue to find ways to connect with their constituencies.

A recent U.S. study revealed that 93 percent of Americans believe a company should have a presence in social media, while 85 percent believe a company

should not only be present but also interact with its consumers via social media. In fact, 56 percent of American consumers feel both a stronger connection with and better served by companies when they can interact with them in a social media environment. Another U.S. study shows that charitable organizations are outpacing the business world in their use of social media. These reports can be read at [www.umassd.edu/cmr](http://www.umassd.edu/cmr) and at [www.coneinc.com/content1182](http://www.coneinc.com/content1182).

Here are a few web resources to help navigate the different web tools available and to help understand which tools are appropriate for different organizations based on the community's experience.

Commoncraft.com: Learn about new web tools with user-friendly video animation.

Beth.typepad.com: A blog on how non-profits can use social media.

Socialmedia.biz: A website on social networking and web2.0 tools.

Diosacommunications.blogspot.com: Web2.0 communications for non-profits.

Frogloop.com: A non-profit communications and marketing blog.

*Celina Agaton is Manager of Communications and Membership at Volunteer Toronto.*

## **PEER EXPERT**

by Lian Ellis

**Scenario:** *Could you please provide us with some tips and pitfalls regarding the use of electronic communication with volunteers?*

### **Response:**

As professionals in recruiting and placing volunteers, we know there are many ways to communicate with our target market. Traditional methods such as the mail and telephone are still available, but today we also have a wide choice of Internet communication tools just a mouse-click away.

One of these tools is email and while some still assume email is only a young person's choice, this is not reflected in studies on computer use. A 2003 study found that 64% of adults (18-64) used email.<sup>1</sup> By 2006, those numbers had soared to 88% for the 18-29 age group and nearly 92% for the 29-65 age group<sup>2</sup> while a recent Canadian survey places email use among those 16 and up at 92%.<sup>3</sup> Even if your volunteers do not own their own computers, the majority of them are online!

The successful use of email as a communication tool requires some understanding of the technology, but more importantly, it requires some sensitivity to obtain efficient use without sacrificing personal communication.

Email is a great way to send timely kudos for an administrative job well done, acknowledge a success with a client or recognize an anniversary with the agency. “It is terrific that you got the client to join in the yoga session!” or even simply, “Thanks for being so prompt with your report!”, takes very little time to write but lets the volunteer know that you appreciate their efforts.

The other way that email can be useful is in connecting small groups of volunteers, thereby increasing their bond with each other and the agency. For instance, sending a reminder about an orchid-growing workshop might be appreciated and attended by a group of gardening volunteers, or a free first-aid course notice might interest human service volunteers.

The group email leads to another topic - the dreaded mass email. Keep in mind that people do not like junk mail in their electronic mailboxes any more than they like receiving it in their regular mailboxes.

If you are having a special event by all means send an email and attach a poster but keep the email simple. Just list the essential facts. They will read the details in your poster if they are interested in your event. It is also important that the poster be in a format that is commonly accessible or it may arrive as a frustrating jumble of squiggles. A commonly used tool is the PDF or Portable Document Format.

The last issue is, in my opinion, the most significant, yet it seems to be the most overlooked - privacy. It is imperative that you protect the privacy of your volunteers. Keep the addresses in mass mailings confidential by using blind carbon copy (bcc) function and never forward an email without first deleting the addresses already in it. The group that is receiving the forwarded email should not receive the addresses of your friends or business connections.

When email is used correctly and with consideration, it can be a timely and economical tool for sending personal words of praise or support and a great way to stay connected with your volunteers!

*Lian Ellis is the Coordinator of Volunteer Services at Brain Injury Services in Hamilton, Ontario.*

## ITEM OF INTEREST

Introducing cjvrm.org ...

We are thrilled to announce the arrival of the Canadian Journal of Volunteer Resources Management's new website at [www.cjvrm.org](http://www.cjvrm.org). For more than 16 years, the Journal has been showcasing Canadian talent in the management of volunteers. We are proud to now share your stories with an Internet audience.

The goals of [www.cjvrm.org](http://www.cjvrm.org) are:

- to increase the profile of the Canadian Journal of Volunteer Resources Management;
- to encourage more individuals to contribute to the Journal, through writing articles and volunteering; and
- to increase access to information about volunteer resource management in Canada, through the availability of archived issues.

Please visit our new website and, while browsing, take a few minutes to give us your feedback through our online survey.

# JOURNAL OF VOLUNTEER RESOURCES MANAGEMENT

Editorial Process and Guidelines for Authors

## Objective

The Journal of Volunteer Resources Management is intended:

1. to serve as a credible source of information on the management of volunteers in Canada;
2. to provide a forum for the exchange of ideas and to encourage networking among managers of volunteers;
3. to provide a professional development tool for managers of volunteers;
4. to recognize and encourage Canadian talent in the field of management of volunteers;
5. to include in each issue at least two articles that will consider different views on a specific and predetermined theme.

## Target Audience

The Journal's intended audience includes managers of volunteers, educators, media and funders of not-for-profit organizations across the country.

## Submissions

All manuscripts will be accepted on diskette or via e-mail in either Microsoft Word or Word Perfect. Submissions should be written according to "Canadian Style - A Guide to Writing and Editing" - Secretary of State, Dundurn Press. External reviewers may be engaged to review content if deemed advisable by the committee.

The revised draft is edited for clarity and consistency by the Editorial Team.

The edited version is returned to the author for acceptance along with an approval form for signature.

The signed form is to be returned to the Editorial Team within a week along with any suggestions for final revisions.

## Format and Style

Authors are asked to respect the following word counts:

	Words	Pages
<b>Lead Article</b>	1000	5-6
<b>Secondary Article</b>	700-800	2-3
<b>Book Review</b>	150	1

The lead article will look at the topic in some depth and will normally require the author to conduct research into current trends and perspectives on the subject.

The secondary article will adopt a more practical approach, including personal experiences and opinions.

## Advertising

Limited advertising space will be allowed in the Journal, for materials of direct relevance to managers of volunteer service, and as long as it conforms to the guidelines set out by the Editorial Team.

## Guidelines:

1. Only ¼ page and ½ page ads will be accepted.
2. Ad must be camera-ready.
3. A maximum of one page of ads will be permitted per issue.
4. Job ads are not recommended.
5. Cost is to be determined by the Editorial Team.

## LOOKING AHEAD

PAVR-O 2009 Conference

“Capital Connections”

May 19 - 21

Ottawa, ON

[www.pavro.on.ca](http://www.pavro.on.ca)

## DEADLINES FOR SUBMISSIONS & THEMES

Issue	Deadline	Theme
Volume 17.1	articles due end of December 2008	Volunteers in Sports and Leisure
Volume 17.2	articles due end of March 2009	The Economy and Volunteerism
Volume 17.3	articles due end of September 2009	Boomer Volunteer Engagement