

Volunteering 2.0: Is It For You?

There are many benefits to online volunteering. As [United Nations Volunteers](#) puts it, “Online volunteering is fast, easy—and most of all, effective.” Before jumping in to lend a hand, though, you may be wondering if this type of activity is a good fit for you. To find out, ask yourself the following questions:

1. How much time are you able to contribute as an online volunteer?

While volunteering remotely has its advantages, taking on an online assignment comes with the same set of responsibilities and commitments as would an in-person task. It is therefore important to have a realistic understanding of how much free time you have available. How will this commitment fit into your day-to-day? Ask yourself what is a reasonable amount of time that you could contribute to a cause—especially during the pandemic, when most of us are already juggling working from home with providing other types of care. Is your task going to be a recurring one (say, daily or weekly) or will it be a one-off? Does the project have a cap on volunteer hours, or could you set one with your partner organization? Lastly, is there any wiggle room if extensions are required?

2. What about online volunteering excites you?

One of the major appeals of volunteering online is the flexibility it affords participants. Thanks to the internet, you are no longer confined to your city of residence because you can now lend a hand pretty much anywhere in the world. That said, online volunteering is not meant to completely eliminate off-site interaction or other forms of connection. Ask yourself what excites you the most about the flexibility of online volunteering: is it the opportunity to be of service during the pandemic? The chance to learn about other countries and cultures? A way for you to use your specialized skills outside of office hours or with reduced barriers to access? Answers to these questions will help you more clearly identify the kinds of roles and opportunities that interest you—which, in turn, will help you make the most of your experience as a volunteer.

3. How involved will you be in community/organization life?

Some volunteer tasks support vital operations such as translations, business planning, or mentoring and may therefore require a higher level of involvement with the organization whose mission you are supporting. This could take place in the form of semi-regular meetings with staff members, participation in groups such as google hangout, as well as occasional progress reports. Other tasks, on the other hand, are designed to function independently and with limited interaction. You may have a preference between the two, so think about what kind of role you wish to play in the life of the organization and/or community you will be serving—more (or less!) involvement could be the key to keeping up your enthusiasm and momentum over time.

4. Do you thrive when interacting with others?

While some tasks may be more solitary than others, as an online volunteer you are still part of a community. When picking the project or organization you wish to support, ask yourself how important social interaction is to you. Do you work better when you have a chance to receive feedback from others? Do you enjoy ‘[virtual happy hours](#)’ and other team-building activities where you have a chance to feel included in the day-to-day life of a project? There are endless possibilities when it comes to online volunteering, and thinking about what kind of experience you wish to have will help you pick (or create!) the role that makes the most sense for you.

5. What's the culture of the 'place'?

Whether you're volunteering for a project or an established organization, these 'places' will have unique working cultures and workflows. Are there any specific platforms or tools that your peers use to manage tasks, share feedback, or stay connected? Are you familiar with them or could you learn how to use them for your role? Do you already have profiles set up or will you be given access to organizational accounts? If you don't know the answer, don't be afraid to do a little information interviewing ahead of committing to a role—you'll save yourself (and your peers!) a lot of valuable time!

6. Do you have a reliable internet connection?

This question may be obvious, but it's key! Where will you be online volunteering from? If you're thinking of getting started during the pandemic, this most likely means connecting from home. Are you sharing your connection with other family members or roommates? Are there specific times of the day that are quieter or when the internet runs faster for you? Do you share any equipment (such as microphones, headsets, cameras, etc.) with others? All of these pieces will make a big difference to your volunteering set-up!

Motivation is key in any volunteering opportunity, but as an online volunteer it is particularly important that you possess the ability to motivate yourself. 'Knowing thyself', especially if this is a new experience for you, is a key way to ensure that you pick the role and project that helps you stay focused and excited. If you're finding yourself with a desire for greater connection, or if you think you have time and skills that could help others during this unique historical moment, then online volunteering may be just the thing for you. Will you try it?