

Volunteering in the 21st Century



Communicating with social media

Social media enables people to connect with each other in an online space. It is a great way to connect and share information about volunteering, particularly for young people and those in geographically isolated areas. Social media presents great, low cost and free marketing opportunities.

What is it?

Social media refers to internet applications that allow people to generate and exchange information. There are lots of different applications, with new ones continually being developed. Below are the four main types:

- Collaborative projects enable people to create content together e.g. Wikipedia.
- Blogs are websites where entries are displayed in reverse chronological order e.g. WordPress.
- Content communities enable the sharing of media content (photos or videos) between people e.g. Flickr and YouTube.
- Social networking sites enable people to connect through the creation of a personal profile inviting people to share information e.g. Facebook, Myspace and Twitter.

Potential benefits

Social media has the potential to support strong online communities that complement and enhance face-to-face interactions. This can be a significant benefit to geographically isolated communities.

Social media can also help:

- Enable more of your members and the broader community to be well-informed of your activities and upcoming events
- Build a more inclusive environment for members and supporters to share thoughts, ideas and comments with each other.
- Attract new sponsors - more online followers or website 'hits' means more opportunities for sponsors to promote their brand
- Receive membership subscription fees more quickly and reliably through online payment options
- Connect to online donations services such as GIVE NOW - www.givenow.com.au

Getting Started

Are you new to using social media and not sure how to start? Here are some tips that might help:

Have a go!

It is good to have an understanding of social media and its applications. One of the ways to do this is to have a look at how people use different applications and experiment with them.

Have a purpose

Be clear about why your program or organisation wants to use social media, who you want to connect with and what you want to share.

Find out what people are using

What are the social media applications that people in your community are already using? Consider developing a social media strategy based around this information.

Work around your skill level

Find out the level of competency and confidence that exists within your organisation in relation to using social media. This may inform the type of social media application you use and areas for professional development.

Talk to others

There may be opportunities for community organisations to work together and contribute or manage a shared online space. Young people use these technologies all the time - so talk to them.

Ideas For Using It

There are lots of ways to use social media to promote, engage, collaborate, communicate and connect with volunteers. Here are some ideas to get you started, you could:

- Share stories about the work of young volunteers – you could write these or a volunteer could take responsibility for this.
- Share photos and video footage from volunteer events, to inspire and inform others about volunteering with your organisation.
- Present issues, problems or new ideas and invite volunteers to make suggestions, comment and ask questions.
- Share information about changes to legislation or policy relevant to volunteers. Volunteers can share their thoughts and ask questions by commenting on blog articles.

Issues of Access

Some organisations have processes and policies that inhibit the use of social media applications. In these instances you might want to consider:

- Advocating for access to social media applications as a tool for engagement with young people and young volunteers.
- Build on opportunities that already exist within your community and value add, rather than creating your own. For example, posting volunteering opportunities on Volunteering Victoria's Facebook page or the Victorian government's Volunteer Portal (www.volunteer.vic.gov.au)

Do Some Planning

To maximise the benefits of social media and reduce the time spent, consider:

- Choosing social media applications that reflect your organisation's resourcing, skill level and that are appropriate for your audience.
- Identifying who is going to be responsible for creating and managing the content for your social media applications. This could be the responsibility of a staff member or a role for a volunteer. More than one administrator should be appointed.



- Utilising platform sharing applications to cross post between applications. For example, interesting updates on your website can be shared on your organisation's Facebook page.
- Developing and implementing a social media usage policy that details processes that include: responding to comments and/or complaints on organisational social networking sites, as well as staff, volunteer and member conduct on these sites.
- Ensuring that your organisation's media policy details that photos and video images may be posted on social media applications. Parental permission should be sought for minors.

The inclusion of social media in your organisation should complement an overall engagement strategy - not be the only form of engagement.

This information was provided by the Youth Affairs Council of Victoria Inc.

For more information about young people and volunteering visit their website at www.yacvic.org.au