

Virtual Volunteering: Not the Wave of the Future, But The Wave of Today

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Author:

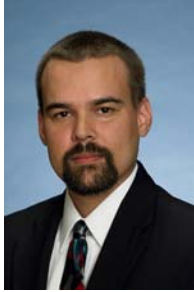
**Lawrence W. Hood, Jr.
Lance Hood Consulting**

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NOTE: This Bio Has Been Updated Since the Material Has Been Updated

Lawrence “Lance” W. Hood, Jr.

Not-for-profit professional with skills in all aspects of not-for-profit management and training expertise in leadership, management, public relations and marketing (both fundraising and communications).



As a not-for-profit professional/consultant, Lance taps his more than seven years of experience in the not-for-profit arena and 13 years in volunteer leadership positions to provide a full spectrum of services to not-for-profit organizations from training to project assistance. His clients have included groups ranging in size from four active volunteers to over four million with a service area as small as one community to international in scope.

Throughout his career, he has served on numerous volunteer boards, worked with large and small not-for-profit groups, facilitated support groups for various organizations and has spoken to groups ranging from 10 to 600 within the United States and abroad. Lance has been a volunteer executive director for a membership-based organization, a training coordinator, a field services manager, a performing arts theatre manager, a volunteer coordinator, a teacher, a tutor and a soccer coach among other responsibilities.

In his spare time, Lance is an active volunteer. He currently sits on a volunteer board in the Dallas area, as well as two national advisory boards. Additionally, Lance recently served as the executive director (a volunteer position) with the Network of Directors of Volunteers in Texas (NDVT), where he also served on the professional development committee, and served as a homeland security peer reviewer for the Corporation for National and Community Service. He is a past chairman of the Association for Volunteer Administration’s awards committee and a former Daily Points of Light Award judge.

In his professional life, Lance is the Field Services Director for The Mended Hearts, Inc. (MHI). As the director, he works hand-in-hand with MHI’s Board of Directors ensuring the field organization has the skills and resources needed to be as effective as possible in offering the gift of hope to heart patients, their families and caregivers. His role entails designing and delivering training programs on various topics, assisting in the development of new chapters, providing support to existing chapters and connecting interested parties with volunteer opportunities across the country. Additionally, he oversees the development and implementation of new programs for MHI. This includes Mended *Little* Hearts (designed to provide support to parents/caregivers of children diagnosed with congenital heart defects/heart diseases).

Academically, he has earned a Master of Business Administration (with a concentration in Business Leadership and a specializing in Not-For-Profit Management) from the University of Dallas in 2003 and a Bachelor of Science degree in Maritime Administration from Texas A&M University at Galveston in 1997.

Lance’s personal and professional goals are all based on helping others achieve their dreams and bettering themselves.

Sampling of Professional Speaking Engagements & Workshops

MHI National Conference – The Mended Hearts, Inc. (MHI)	2005
Various State Leadership Trainings – Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD)	1999 – 2005
Various Victim Services Trainings – MADD	2000 – 2005
MADD National Conference – MADD	2000, 2003 – 2004
2004 Conference – Volunteers of America, Texas Division	2004
Leadership MADD (Formerly Leadership 2000) – MADD National	2001, 2003 – 2004
Various CLEWs (Community Education Workshops) – Hugh O’Brian Youth Leadership (HOBY)	1999 – 2003
Texas Youth Power Camp – Texas Alcohol & Beverage Commission & MADD Texas	2000 – 2002
Certificate in Volunteer Management Program – University of North Texas	2001 – 2002
Volunteer Management Conference – Volunteer Center of North Texas	2001 – 2002
Texas North Leadership Seminar – HOBY	1996–1997 & 1999–2001
National Community Service Conference – Points of Light Foundation	2000
Japanese Delegation on Victim Issues	1999
World Leadership Congress – HOBY	1996 – 1997
ISO 14000; The New Environmental Standard – American Bureau of Shipping	1996
TAMUG Teaches Underclassmen Series – Texas A&M University at Galveston	1995 – 1996

ii. Disclaimers from the Author

Before reading this information there are a few statements that I would like to make that will hopefully make the material more beneficial. First off, I am writing this without knowing the background of its readers. I do not know if all readers are newer to the field of volunteer management or “old pros.” Due to this some, parts of the reading are rather basic.

Secondly, I am assuming that everyone understands that volunteers are not free. Working with volunteers requires time, energy and a continued effort to ensure the volunteer program is successful. Therefore, there is very little mention to the importance of extensively planning your program. Simply that it needs to be done, and suggestions on how to go about doing it.

Lastly, I am available for further consultation on any and all topics related to virtual volunteering or volunteer management in general. If you have questions, please feel free to contact me directly at LanceHood@aol.com. I am more than willing to assist.

I. Introduction to VV

What do you think of when you hear the term “Virtual Volunteering?” Do images of Star Wars pop into your head? Maybe, Luke using the force to run a fundraising campaign. Or do you think of recruiting volunteers on-line? Posting a volunteer opportunity on a website, and hoping that someone will respond. No matter what you think of when you hear the term, for many non-profits, and for-profits, the future (which is now) of volunteering is in virtual volunteering. But, what the heck is it?

For many organizations, virtual volunteering is simply recruiting volunteers through on-line sources. Be it their own website, volunteer opportunity clearinghouses or some other source. However, virtual volunteering, as defined by The Virtual Volunteering Project out of The University of Texas, is:

...volunteer tasks completed, in whole or in part, via the Internet and a home or work computer. Virtual volunteering allows agencies to expand the benefits of their volunteer programs, by allowing for more volunteers to participate and by utilizing volunteers in new areas (<http://www.serviceleader.org/vv/vvwhatis.html>).

For the purposes of this material, virtual volunteering will be broken down into four steps. The first step goes deep into virtual volunteering and ensuring that an organization is ready to involve virtual volunteers. The second step is designing the volunteer assignments. The third step is recruiting volunteers on-line (for virtual and on-site assignments). And the final step involves keeping everything running smoothly from recognition to continued recruitment. As you can see, the process is extremely similar to that of regular volunteer recruitment.

II. Preparing Your Organization

Virtual Volunteering is a major change in philosophy for many volunteer programs. Historically, we think of volunteering as hands-on face-to-face time between individuals. However, long distance volunteering is not anything new. The Peace Corps has run a letter writing campaign for years between Peace Corps

members and school children. Virtual volunteering is simply putting a new spin on this process. Now, Peace Corps members can e-mail those same letters to those same students. In many cases, virtual volunteering is a way for an organization to expand their network of services and expand their volunteer base.

A. Determine the Needs

So, what needs to be done to prepare an organization for virtual volunteering? The first step is to determine what needs to be done in general. Whether you are preparing to recruit volunteers for traditional volunteer assignments or virtual assignments, the organization must have a clear understanding of what its needs are. Far too often, volunteers are recruited for non-profits without a clear idea of what the needs of the organization are.

For instance, many non-profits work on the “first warm body through the door” theory of volunteer recruitment. Whenever someone walks in the door, they are given whatever needs to be done right then and there. Often times this is a clerical assignment. But, what if the local bank president was the person who walked through the door. If you knew that you had a fundraising campaign coming up, would it not make more sense to have this individual head-up or at least be part of that campaign than doing clerical work?

The most important aspect of volunteer management is attempting to match up a volunteer to assignments that he/she wants to do. Is this difficult? At times it is. However, if you can keep a volunteer doing what he/she wants to do, you are much more likely to keep that individual as a volunteer.

B. Questions to Ask

Here are some good basic questions to ask before getting started.

- What is our staff unable to accomplish that would benefit the organization in some way? Could this be done on-line?
- What would it be better to have a volunteer doing than a paid staff? For instance, in non-profits it makes more sense to ask a volunteer to be a spokesperson than it does a paid staff due to their potential connection to the mission.
- Is there any training that our staff needs to effectively engage and use volunteers?
- Does the volunteer manager/coordinator have buy-in from the individuals who will be utilizing these volunteers?

For the most part, these are the same questions that you ask for a traditional volunteer recruitment campaign. However, there are differences. For instance, does your staff need training on computers? Virtual Volunteers will be using e-mail to communicate. Do you have a system in place for the volunteer manager to answer his/her e-mail in a timely manner?

III. Designing Vol. Assignments

Have you ever accepted a paid position without knowing what your job was? People like to know what is expected of them and what they will be asked to do. Far too often, volunteer managers neglect to

think of volunteering as a job. However, that is exactly what volunteering is. Volunteers are doing work without getting a pay check.

Therefore, it is crucial for an organization to be able to tell a volunteer what will be expected of them, and what they will be doing. In virtual volunteering, you do not have the ability to describe a volunteer assignment in person or over the phone in many cases. You must have something in writing as to what the assignment is all about. This will not only let the volunteer know that the organization is prepared to use his/her talents, but it will ultimately save the organization valuable time.

A. Questions to Ask

Here are some questions to ask while designing volunteer assignments.

- What is the purpose of this assignment? Will it benefit the agency directly, indirectly or at all?
- What are the volunteer's responsibilities?
- What are the outcomes/goals of the assignment?
- Who will the volunteer report to? Very often in virtual volunteering, the volunteer will directly report to someone other than the volunteer manager/coordinator.
- What are the qualifications or skills that the volunteer needs to have to perform this assignment?
- What is the time commitment of the assignment? It is a good idea to state this in both

daily, weekly or monthly totals and an overall total.

- What are the benefits that the volunteer could get from this assignment? Be creative. Remember that not all volunteers do so for a tangible item.

B. What Can Be Done

The most popular question around virtual volunteering is, "What can a virtual volunteer do?" That is a very fair question, and one that many organization cannot seem to come up with an answer for. However, here are some examples of what virtual volunteers can and are doing around the world:

- mentoring children,
- building and maintaining web sites,
- creating databases,
- providing technical assistance,
- translations,
- information searches,
- the list goes on and on.

It is crucial for an organization to "think outside of the box" when designing on-line volunteer assignments. For instance, many support organizations are running on-line chat rooms that double as support groups, and they are being hosted by volunteers. Almost all non-profits have assignments that can be performed in whole or in part virtually.

IV. Recruiting On-Line

The information in this section can be used to recruit both online volunteers and face-to-face volunteers. There will be no separation

of the two, due to the fact that recruitment involves the same steps.

A. Do's of Online Recruiting

Do have a system in place in which the organization can respond to inquiries within 48 hours or less. If you don't answer your e-mail that quickly, do not leave an e-mail address as an option to reply to.

Do ensure that whoever answers the entities phone is aware that the organization has posted volunteer assignments, and where the inquiries should be directed.

Do have a detailed job description available to e-mail or fax to potential volunteers.

Do use your entities web site as a place for potential volunteers to get more information or sign-up to volunteer.

B. Don'ts of Online Recruiting

Don't stop your regular volunteer recruiting campaign. Virtual recruiting should not be the only type of recruiting your organization is using.

Don't expect everyone who inquires about a posting to become a volunteer. It is much easier to click a button that says you are interested in a particular assignment, than it is to actually do the work involved.

Don't forget to train on line volunteers in your organizations mission, expectations of volunteers, benefits of volunteering, etc.

Don't forget to screen on line volunteers, especially if they will be working with vulnerable populations (i.e. youth and seniors).

C. Where to Post

The first place an organization should post an opportunity is on its own web site. Individuals who have come to your site for one reason or another are more likely to be interested in volunteering than someone who sees it on a message board or clearinghouse list.

The following are free on line "volunteer opportunity clearinghouses." These web sites list volunteer opportunities available all over the world. In most cases, a potential volunteer can search by either his/her zip code or the specific name of the organization. It will then pull-up all of the volunteer opportunities that have been posted that meet the criteria.

www.volunteermatch.org - Possibly the most widely known of all the online clearinghouses.

www.servenet.org - A great resource to recruit youth volunteers. Servenet is actually run by Youth Service America.

www.idealists.org - Known more as an employment opportunity database. Idealist is starting to become more known for its volunteer opportunity section.

[Additional hint: List your entities name in full (i.e. Mothers Against Drunk Driving) AND any acronym you may use (i.e. MADD).]

This is only a partial listing of the clearinghouses on the web. These are, however, the three most widely know and used sources.

V. Keeping it on an Even Keel

Virtual volunteers should be treated no different than any other volunteer. If there is a volunteer appreciation event...invite them. If there is a volunteer training...include them. If there is a newsletter going out...send it to them. If they do a good job...let them know it. If they have done something wrong...let them know that too.

It is important to treat these volunteers, while different in a sense, just like all of your other volunteers. It is highly possible for your virtual volunteers to become great recruiters and fundraisers for your cause.

VI. Additional Resources

Virtual volunteering may be a rather new type of recruitment, but there is a wealth of information available on the subject. Here is

a list of resources for you to go to for more information on the subject.

- www.serviceleader.org - Major source of information on virtual volunteering including frequently asked questions and a customizable handbook.
- www.serviceleader.org/vv/book.html - Free 138 page book on getting your organization ready for virtual volunteering.
- www.volunteering.org.uk/oct2001feature.htm
- The three recruiting clearing-houses listed earlier also contain information, as well as offering a monthly e-mail news-letter.