

Virtual Volunteerism Among Older Adults in a Post-Pandemic World: Is the Volunteer Sector Ready?

Jennifer Crittenden, Rachel Coleman, Nathan Tarbox, Jennifer Crone, & Sandra Butler

Background

- Volunteering has been linked to improve health, well-being, and social connection among older adults.
- During the pandemic, virtual volunteering (VV) provided an avenue for continued connection and community engagement among older adults.
- Organizations had the opportunity to transition volunteer roles to virtual spaces, create more long-term roles for virtual volunteering, and sustain a wider use of VV into the future.
- Newly learned digital skills scaled up by the pandemic could have continuous benefit for older adults who wish to engage in internet-based leisure activities such as virtual volunteering.
- A key research gap remains within the literature exploring the position of VV in a post-pandemic world. Along with this gap are new questions about how to make volunteering more accessible.

Research Aims

- Identify the benefits of virtual volunteerism for older adult volunteers
- Identify the opportunities and challenges of VV from both the volunteer and host program/site perspectives

Potential Application of Findings

- Understanding how VV is currently used and how it can fit within volunteer opportunities going forward will allow the nonprofit sector to tap into a cadre of volunteers who either cannot engage in traditional volunteering or who find VV more appealing.
- Findings will identify the types of training, supports and infrastructure needed to successfully engage older adults in VV.



Virtual volunteerism increases accessibility for older adult volunteers and provides numerous benefits to the volunteer.

However, virtual volunteer opportunities require programs to build and maintain necessary infrastructure.

Technology access, training, and support are key elements for success.



Scan to visit the project webpage and view research reports and products
mainecenteronaging.umaine.edu/vvstudy

Research Methods

Methods-To-Date:

- **RSVP and Key Informant Semi-Structured Interviews**
 - 36 representatives from 30 organizations
- **RSVP Program Director Survey**
 - Domains: current and former virtual volunteer assignments, perceived benefits and challenges, management practices, management attitudes towards virtual volunteering, and predicted future use of virtual volunteering
 - Analysis was conducted across the full sample and between groups. Groups included: 1) Programs currently using VV; 2) Those not using VV but having done so previously; 3) Programs that have never used VV.
- **RSVP Station Staff Semi-Structured Interviews**
 - 11 interviews with RSVP station staff and volunteer managers
 - Qualitative data analysis underway
- **Collaboration with VolunteerMatch**
 - Analysis of over 800,000 virtual and non-virtual volunteer job opportunities marketed to older adults from 1997 through 2023

Upcoming Research Activities

- Analyze 2023 CEV Census data related to virtual volunteerism
- Foster Grandparent and Senior Companion Program interviews to understand virtual applications
- Develop and launch older volunteer survey to gather perspectives on virtual volunteering.