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Online Volunteering in Action

TakingITGlobal
INSPIRE INFORM INVOLVE

TakingITGlobal (TIG) is an international youth-led organization that helps young people find inspiration, access information, get involved, and take action to improve their local and global communities. The TakingITGlobal.org online community connects youth in over 220 countries and territories and involves young people in decision-making.

Nabuur.com is an online volunteering platform that links Neighbours (online volunteers) with Villages (local communities) in Africa, Asia and Latin America. Connected through Nabuur.com, Neighbours and local communities learn about each other, share ideas and find solutions to local issues.

You can download this guide at www.tigweb.org/action/guide

TakingITGlobal's Guide to Action is designed to help you turn your ideas and dreams into reality.

WHAT IS ONLINE VOLUNTEERING?

Online volunteering is the act of donating one's time and skills for a cause through the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs). Working without financial remuneration, volunteers typically join an organization they admire to contribute to its growth, or join a project because they strongly believe in a cause and want to play a role in affecting its outcomes.

QUIZ: Myths of Online Volunteering

There are many myths about online volunteering. Play along to the quiz questions below to see if you can pick out the TRUE statements from the FALSE ones.

1. **Online volunteering is easy**
   TRUE or FALSE?

2. **Online volunteering replaces on-site volunteering**
   TRUE or FALSE?

3. **I don't have to stick to a schedule when volunteering online**
   TRUE or FALSE?

4. **Online volunteering is a solitary gig**
   TRUE or FALSE?

5. **Online volunteering does not require communication skills**
   TRUE or FALSE?

6. **Online volunteering is mostly about technology related tasks**
   TRUE or FALSE?

Answers

1. **FALSE!** It is true that volunteering from your computer has some comforts. But taking on a volunteering assignment online is equal to volunteering in a physical setting. You will have responsibilities and deadlines, and are expected to fully commit to the task at hand.

2. **FALSE!** Online volunteering is not meant in any way to eliminate on-site volunteering programs. In many organizations, an online volunteering component is complementary to the on-site program. These virtual opportunities offer a chance to volunteers who may not be able to work on-site due to accessibility, schedule, or other obstacles.

3. **FALSE!** There are freedoms that come with volunteering online, for example picking when you can work on your assignment. However the project you're volunteering for may have strict deadlines, so be sure to check with your project coordinator and determine how much time you will need to spend on each task, and if you will need to be 'online' (for an online chat meeting or a progress check-in) on specific days and times.

4. **FALSE!** Yes, it's true that you'll be working online and may not get a chance to interact with peer volunteers face to face. But most often you'll be part of a community. Many organizations have virtual hubs where online volunteers can connect and network with one another. Some organizations even host physical meet-ups for online volunteers. And of course, you will always have the support of the organization you're working with.

5. **FALSE!** Even if your online assignment includes designing a website or researching information, you'll need to communicate your progress and findings to the project coordinator and sometimes communicate with peer volunteers or individuals who are dependent on your assignment.

6. **FALSE!** Not every organization will need to have a website built. There are a wide variety of online volunteering opportunities that are not solely related to technology. Examples of tasks may include advocacy, research, translation, mentoring/tutoring, data entry, writing, policy and procedure development, and more.

Why Volunteer?

There are many reasons for volunteering. At times, volunteer experience may be part of a school's credit requirements, other times, it may be a way for an individual to enhance their skills and competencies for future employment or educational opportunities. No matter the reasons, volunteering is proven to have a significant impact on society, and it has traditionally been linked with: making services more caring and personal; encouraging innovation and a fresh perspective; promoting equality; enabling a service to be user-led; promoting community cohesion; reducing dependency, promoting equality; and helping the unemployed or underprivileged enter the work market.

Online volunteering is a fantastic way to do all of the above… but it is also a way to transcend geographical boundaries and encourage international, and often intercultural, exchanges. Online volunteers, in fact, donate their time from the comfort of their home, which means they can be part of an organization or campaign they admire even if it is not located in their country. That's right, online volunteering fosters connections between a wide array of active individuals, and allows you to feel included in processes of change that may not be as accessible to you off-line. As an online volunteer, you often have the chance to expand your network and/or that of the organization you are volunteering for, all the while building new skills, addressing challenges faced by an organization and doing so with a great degree of flexibility.

What's more, online volunteering is known for boosting confidence and self-esteem, promoting a sense of ownership, providing a source of local know-how, as well as being a means of precipitating change *(see, for example, the Change section in this guide.)*

QUIZ: Are You Ready to Volunteer Online?

Volunteering online for a cause of your choice has many benefits, yet it also requires a tremendous amount of commitment and self-discipline, and it ultimately may not be for everyone. The quiz below will guide you through some questions to determine if online volunteering is the right path for you. If you answered YES to all 6 questions, you're ready to dive into the world of online volunteering!

1. Do you have regular access to the Internet?   YES or NO

Regular access to the Internet is a requirement to become an effective online volunteer. Before you sign on to volunteer online with the organization of choice, make sure to have a clear understanding of the hours you will be expected to contribute.

Be upfront (with yourself and the organization) about your own online accessibility. Do you have a computer at home, and regular access to the Internet? Which additional tools (webcam, specific design programs, chat functionality, etc.) will you need, and do you have these readily available to you?

2. Can you work with limited supervision?   YES or NO

It's true that online volunteering affords much independence, but it can also demand a lot of concentration and self-discipline. If you have the ability to self-direct, make decisions on your own, and work with little supervision, online volunteering may be the right opportunity for you.

3. Do you possess excellent organizational skills?   YES or NO

Working on online assignments, be it research, translating content, building a website, etc. requires a great deal of organizational attention and a keen eye for detail. At all times make sure you know what is expected of you and keep a list of to-do items with clear deadlines. Report your progress and communicate directly with the coordinator, and track your volunteer hours (if the organization calls for it).

I started volunteering for TIG mostly to try and make a difference, even if just for a short while. Years later, the experience has been such a gratifying one that I now want to have a career in social entrepreneurship!
–Mariel Garcia

http://profiles.tigweb.org/FaerieGirl

4. Do you have excellent communication skills?   YES or No

For the most part, online volunteering will require you to communicate via email, chat messaging or by posting in online discussions, depending on the organization's processes. Excellent writing and communication skills are required. To be an effective communicator, be clear, prompt in your replies, and always follow up accordingly.

5. Are you comfortable working with deadlines?   YES or NO

Online assignments will have defined deadlines. To be an effective online volunteer, you need to adhere to these deadlines and communicate regularly on the progress with your project coordinator. You must also pace your work, and be flexible if a deadline's original date is changed. Keep in mind that your assignment may be the part of a larger whole; if you miss your deadline, it may affect the course of the entire project.

6. Do you have the ability to self-motivate?   YES or NO

Motivation is key in any volunteering opportunity, but as an online volunteer it is particularly important that you possess the ability to motivate yourself. As you may not have regular face-to-face contact (or none at all) with peer volunteers, you can't rely on external motivation. Some volunteers find this a determining test of their ability to volunteer online. If you happen to stray from your task, can you find motivation in your work, and the enthusiasm to see it through?

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What Do Online Volunteers Do?

Online volunteers perform a wide variety of tasks and work in many capacities. As a whole, they provide organizations with the additional skills and expertise needed to succeed: from expanding the organization's network to developing additional internal capacities. Here are some examples to help you understand what online volunteers typically do:

Editorial support: Moderating discussion board threads, blog comments or chats; editing and/or approving content on a website or online community; translating content into other languages; proofreading content.

Outreach support: Assisting an organization with its promotions campaign; managing or participating in social networking strategies; fundraising; facilitating connections between individuals who share the same interests.

Office support: supporting staff members with day-to-day tasks; helping out with correspondence; cataloguing or archiving documents; writing proposals or reports; performing research.

Web support: troubleshooting; designing materials; performing web maintenance operations; ensuring overall quality of online contents; managing an online community.

Community support: mentoring; training or coaching individuals; coordinating a team of other volunteers; writing business plans and strategy documents; facilitating knowledge-sharing; organizing off-line meet ups.

There are no limits to what an online volunteer can do. With a little creativity and help from emerging technologies this list of sample activities is only likely to grow in the future. If you see an opportunity for an online volunteering but the organization you are interested in does not have an online volunteering program in place, don't hesitate to talk to them about starting one up!

How Can I Contribute?

Now that you know more about what a volunteer does and what makes volunteering so valuable and fun, where do you start? Here are some tips to get you started on the right step, and remember, online volunteers are engaged at all levels: from the grassroots to UN-level, so possibilities are virtually endless!

Create Your Online Volunteering Plan

Step1: List your skills and define an outcome

- List your strengths and skills;
- List what skills you would like to learn or refine;
- Why do you want to volunteer? To obtain school credit, to gain work experience or for fun?

Step2: Pick your cause

- What social issues matter to you the most?
- Are you currently involved with any organization, and if so, do you wish to remain with the same organization or in the same sector?
- Do you want to volunteer for a local organization or an international one?

Step3: Schedule your time

- What does your work and school schedule look like? Can you balance your obligations and commit fully to volunteering?
- How long do you foresee being involved with the organization? Will your obligation be a short or long-term volunteering assignment?
- Identify your free time

Step4: Establish contact

- If you have an organization in mind, contact them to inquire about their online volunteering opportunities. If you're interested in volunteering for a particular organization that doesn't seem to have any online volunteering opportunities posted, contact them anyway and offer your virtual availability. They may be able to accommodate you!

- Discuss the role with the project coordinator in a phone conversation or via email. Make sure to ask what the role entails, what is expected of you, the time commitment they are seeking (how many hours per week, for how long), and ask about the support that is offered to their organization's online volunteers.

When I got involved with TIG I wanted to start a project in my country but I had no idea how to make the first step. My experience as a TIG as online volunteer was amazing because it helped me expand my network and I had the opportunity to meet people from around the world who inspired me with their life stories and actions in their local communities. Also, I was able to get in touch with people from my city to launch a project that continues to this day.
–Paulo Farine

http://profiles.tigweb.org/prfarine

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Tools

Now that you have identified your free time and have a better sense of how you would like to contribute your skills, you need to make sure that you have the right ICT tools at your disposal.

First and foremost, make sure you have regular access to the Internet. Most online volunteering programs rely almost exclusively on access to the web, so make sure you are honest about what is available to you. It is not necessary to have Internet access at home, though that is perhaps the most convenient arrangement. If an Internet connection is not available to you at home, you may still be able to access the Internet from your workplace, community center or Internet café, but you may have to take into account time and financial constraints. As an alternative, if you do not have regular Internet access you may be able to get involved as an 'occasional volunteer', helping with ad-hoc projects when need be. In this case, though, it is important to negotiate your involvement directly with the organization so to establish clear expectations on both ends.

Here is a list of ICT tools commonly used by online volunteers, most of which a young person already uses on a regular basis. Not all of these may apply to your specific position, but they are all are valuable communications and self-organizing tools.

TIG has given me the chance to convince myself and others that we can collectively make changes. I've found a way to inspire and be inspired.
–Elizabeth Arceo

http://profiles.tigweb.org/apsaras

Communications

Email

www.hotmail.com
mail.google.com
www.yahoo.com

is a method of exchanging digital messages and one of the key tools used by Online Volunteers to communicate with their team and their peers. Make sure to check your messages often to ensure smooth and timely communication!

Instant Messaging (IM)

www.msn.com
www.aim.com
www.icq.com

IM allows you to communicate between two or more individuals in real time. IM services are based on text-chat, but most of them now have audio and/or video capability, too. Examples of common IM tools are Windows Live Messenger (commonly known as MSN) and Gchat.

Skype

www.skype.com

Skype is an application that allows you to make online voice calls. This is a favourite for many organizations because of Skype's affordable rates: computer-to-computer users can connect worldwide free of charge, while calls to other landlines and mobile phones can be made for a small fee. Skype also has IM, video conferencing and file transfer capabilities.

Social Network Accounts

www.tigweb.org
www.facebook.com
www.twitter.com

Social networks are online communities of people who share similar interests or purposes and are interested in connecting with each other. Social networks use Web 2.0 tools to provide a wide variety of services, including the ability to share files, send instant messages and collaborate with others. They are also a great way to raise awareness on an issue or promote a particular organization or campaign. Some of the web's most popular social networks are: *TakingITGlobal, Facebook, Twitter*

Blog

www.blogger.com
www.wordpress.com

A blog is a type of website where an individual or group of individuals post text entries, often supported by videos and/or pictures. A blog is a way to share opinions and commentaries, as well as to raise awareness on an issue and engage in conversation with others through comments.

Self-Organizing

Wiki
www.wikispaces.com

A wiki is an online page that allows users to create, publish and edit a series of documents in a real-time, collaborative manner. Wikis can be public or private, and are an excellent way to disseminate information, collaborate with others, keep track of your progress and share updates about your work.

Google Docs
docs.google.com

A free, Web-based word processor, spreadsheet, presentation, and form application available to Google users. Through Google Docs, documents can be created and edited online while collaborating in real-time.

Spreadsheets
office.microsoft.com

Spreadsheets are an excellent self-organizing tool, particularly if you are managing a team or a campaign. The most popular spreadsheet application is Microsoft Excel, but there are many equivalents for Mac users and Open Source enthusiasts. By displaying multiple cells in a grid, you can easily keep track of the progress made on your work or by your team.

Word processors
office.microsoft.com

A word processor is an application, such as Microsoft Word, that allows you to create a document to be printed or shared online with others. Used by every online volunteer at least once!

TakingITGlobal Group Pages
www.tigweb.org

a simple and free way for groups of people to communicate and collaborate around projects and shared interests. Groups provide the key tools needed to connect and sustain the activities of a team project, an active discussion group, or a network of people.

TakingITGlobal Projects
www.tigweb.org

an online space, free of cost, for anyone who wants to start or join a project. The pages offer a free mailing list, a web-based archive of correspondence, a document upload-section, and more!

Personal Calendar
calendar.google.ca

A calendar is an essential tool for any online volunteer. Use what works best for you: calendars can be online (try, for example, the calendar connected to your email address), off-line (such as an agenda), or computer-based. If you do not have an established work method, try some of the options above and then pick the one that most strongly matches the way you organize your work in your day-to-day life.

Del.icio.us

www.delicious.com

is a social bookmarking service based online. It is ideal for storing, sharing, and discovering web bookmarks saved by others, and it is a great way to exchange resources with your teammates!

Yousendit

www.yousendit.com

If you have large files to send to your teammates, Yousendit lets you deliver your digital content by storing it on its servers for seven days. Instead of sending bulky email messages, you are provided with a URL that you can then share with your team. Links expire after 7 days or 100 downloads.

Slideshare

www.slideshare.net

a web-based service that lets you upload and share your PowerPoint presentations, Word documents and Adobe PDF Portfolios. Files can be shared publicly or privately, and you have the option of adding audio to them to make a webcast.

Remember to read your job or opportunity description carefully to ensure you have access to the tools needed for your position. If in doubt, ask your organization to clarify your role and the tools you will need to perform your duties effectively. If you are lacking a particular tool or technology, ask if the Organization is going to provide that for you, or if there are ways for you to access that online and free of cost.

TIPS

Being an online volunteer is a truly rewarding opportunity, but not one free of challenges. In general, online volunteers have a proactive attitude, maintain consistent and timely communication, are committed to their role and responsibilities, have good management skills and self-direction and are positive leaders. The next page offers a few concrete tips to help you make the most of your experience.

1. Know what your position is about.

Read the job or opportunity description carefully and make sure you understand what its requirements are. Ask for details on how your involvement will take place and clarify schedule and deadlines.

2. Consider the skills you have to offer.

Think about your past experiences and your interests, how do they complement the skills and responsibilities necessary for the position that interests you?

3. Gather additional information.

Do not hesitate to ask for further information on the project, organization or campaign- communication is essential and having the details you need will help ensure you pick a position that complements your interests, availability and skills.

4. Think about how much you can commit.

Make sure you can commit for the minimum weekly hours and volunteer term before you sign on with the team, online teams rely on the efforts of dedicated volunteers who can help them meet their goals!

5. Get to know your team.

Working with online volunteers from around the world is a truly rewarding experience, but not one free of its challenges. Take the time to get your know your team members- regular communication is an essential part of the success of the team… and it makes the experience a lot more fun!

6. Don't over-commit your schedule.

Make sure you set realistic goals and expectations of yourself, and that the organization you are supporting is aware of your other commitments, so you don't take on too much work all at once.

7. Plan ahead.

Make sure you incorporate your tasks and deadlines into your personal calendar- and make this a habit. This will allow you to meet your deadlines with ease and on time!

8. Ask questions.

If you are not sure what tasks you are supposed to be working on, or how to complete one, don't be afraid to ask, your team is there to support you. It is important to be proactive so that if there are doubts or concerns, you can bring them up and address them quickly, rather than waiting for the organization to find out about them.

9. Give Feedback.

Make sure you let your team know about what is working and what needs to be improved. Your team relies on your feedback to introduce innovations that will help the organization be more effective and supportive of you and your teammates.

10. Learn new skills.

Remember to keep an open attitude towards new challenges- we often learn more about ourselves and our abilities by doing something new than by doing what we're already familiar with.

Communicate with your team

Communication is important because it opens up further avenues of collaboration, it helps keep the team focused, motivated and united, and it is also a way for everyone to share any doubts, success stories or tips. You will have several occasions to communicate with your team members, but first of all, do not forget to ask for their contact information so you know how to reach them! If possible, you may want to arrange a team phone call or online chat every couple of weeks so that you can check in, and remain connected with one another.

Keep Track of your progress

To help you stay focused and on top of your responsibilities, make a check list of all that is required of you to keep track of (ex. Reports, team meetings, duties, deadlines etc.) You can use a spreadsheet or word document to check tasks off month-by-month. This will give you both a visual reminder of your tasks as well as an instant way to monitor your progress. And remember, using a calendar is a great way to remind yourself of short- and long-term deadlines.

Example Checklist
- Make a priority list for the week or month, including detailed key responsibilities and deadlines;
- Make a to-do list based on these priorities;
- Review deadlines and decide if they are realistic or need to be reviewed;
- Always make sure you have the latest information from the project coordinator. Has anything changed since the project began?
- Complete and submit regular progress reports.

Develop your own calendar
- Schedule any upcoming meetings, online chats or conference calls with the coordinator or peer volunteers;
- Schedule in upcoming deadlines;
- Check in with your project coordinator when agreed upon;
- Submit progress reports regularly or as agreed upon.

The leader who exercises power with honour will work from the inside out, starting with him/herself.

-Blaine Lee

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Be a leader

Whether you are working independently or in a team, it is important to maintain a positive attitude and to be a leader in what you do. You have certainly heard of the term "leadership" before, but who exactly is a leader?

Attributes:

Positive Committed to Excellence
Shares the Organization's Vision
Organized Emphatic
Respectful & Respected Self-Motivated
Enthusiastic Honest Motivates Others
Has Integrity Takes Responsibility for Personal Actions
Confident Good Communicator Fair Patient Flexible
Punctual Good Listener Professional
Active Results-Oriented
Resourceful
has a sense of Humour Passionate
Creates Balance

Attitudes:

Set the Example

- A leader inspires others to work on their tasks by setting the example and by managing the team with grace.
- A leader always looks for ways to improve performance, but is also capable of celebrating achievements.
- A leader can work and relate with others, and understands that team members bring their own sets of skills and talents to the team, too.
- A leader has good judgment: he or she must be able to assess situations, determine the pros and cons of any decision and actively seek out a solution. A leader is not afraid of asking for guidance and help.
- A good leader realizes the importance of creating a supportive environment: harmonious relationships contribute to success, whereas conflict slows down the team and brings down the morale!
- A good leader will not use their position of authority for self gratification and promotion, or in a controlling and domineering manner.
- A good leader is aware of his or her responsibilities and knows the organization- this information is what helps them guide others better.

Be a Good Communicator

- A leader is first of all a good listener. Take the time to review your team's feedback and incorporate their best suggestions into your future plans.
- A leader adopts a positive form of communication: put cooperation before personal power, and use friendship and a strong-willed personality to maintain positive communication.
- A leader is a person who is willing to listen to other people's ideas and adapt to change if the situation requires it. A leader is also someone who is able to take constructive criticism.
- A good leader is available and in touch with people. An important leadership skill is the ability to recognize needs and be able to respond to them quickly and in the moment.
- Good leaders conduct meetings in an atmosphere of trust, and display appropriate confidentiality and respect towards others.
- A leader can command attention, and uses the attention in positive and constructive ways.

Know Your Team

- A good leader understands the dynamics of group relationships. Leaders are inclusive and skilled in creating a sense of team unity.
- Leaders are capable of balancing the strengths and weaknesses of the group for best results.
- Leaders establish a personal relationship with team members- both individually and in a team context.
- Leaders ensure that tasks are understood, supervised and accomplished, and create realistic expectations.
- Leaders understand and respect people's different work styles, and try to allow individual expression to transpire while also remaining true to the team's goals and needs.
- Leaders develop a sense of ownership and responsibility in team members.

Give Feedback

- A leader is someone who shows confidence in the team, and acknowledges and celebrates the successes of both the individual and the team.
- Good leaders set and use goals to stay focused.
- Successful leaders not only motivate themselves in personal development but also motivate those around them.

Know Yourself

A leader is eager to refine skills and learn more. There are many resources available out there for people interested in team management, good leadership and improving organizational skills. Do an Internet search based on your interests and needs…or start with TakingITGlobal's Action Guide for ideas! This website is also a great resource to help you set and track your goals: **http://inpowr.com**

All this information might be daunting at first, but remember, leadership is something you acquire and enhance through experience, so we hope you will welcome this opportunity for self-development and professional growth!

CHANGE

Ready to Make Change?

TIP: How to prepare your application

Congratulations, you're ready to submit your application for an online volunteering position! So, how do you do this?

Some organizations will have an online application for you to fill out. Make sure you provide all the necessary information, and if you have any additional comments or questions, or the option to upload a CV or resume, include them as well. If you need to apply via email, below is a list of items to include.

- An updated CV or resume which includes work, academic, and past/ present volunteering experience
- A personal statement which will convey to the organization the reason and motivation why you chose their cause to volunteer
- Specific skills you want to contribute or refine
- Your online availability (and offline availability if physical meetings are required)
- References (if possible, include references from previous volunteer coordinators you have worked with)
- Your contact information, including alternate number to reach you

Reason and judgment are the qualities of a leader.
-Tacitus

1. Social Change

Online volunteering is not an entirely new concept. One of the earliest known examples of virtual volunteering dates back to the 1970's, in the United States, when Project Gutenberg (1), founded by Michael S. Hart, engaged the help of online volunteers to create electronic books (eBooks) of works to be made available to the public domain. To date, Project Gutenberg's digital library boasts over 28,000 items in its collection, and is the product of countless hours devoted by thousands of online volunteers. To this day, volunteers continue their involvement with Project Gutenberg, with tasks such as proofreading, as well as digitizing and recording audio books for people without Internet access.

The reach of online volunteering has only grown since the 1970s, attracting countless online volunteers worldwide working with myriads of organizations and sectors. As the Internet began to offer enhanced connectivity on a wider scale, more organizations began to see the benefit of online volunteering, and in turn, a higher number of volunteers became interested in fulfilling their civic engagement via the use of ICT tools.

At the same time, the growth in online volunteering is not just limited just to the United States. The United Nations Volunteers (**www.unv.org**) programme is the UN organization that contributes to peace and development worldwide through the engagement of volunteers, and is active in 140 countries. Its online volunteering counterpart, the Online Volunteering Service (OV) (**www.online volunteering.org**), was launched in 2000 as part of the NetAid initiative. Since its inception, OV has mobilized thousands of online volunteers to end extreme poverty, especially through its extensive database of online volunteering opportunities.

Online volunteers are also making a tremendous impact by contributing their time and efforts to the Millenium Development Goals (MDG's). World Volunteer Web (**www.worldvolunteerweb.org**), a part of UNV, is an organization of over 20,000 individuals and participating organizations, that "supports the volunteer community by serving as a global clearing house for information and resources linked to volunteerism that can be used for campaigning, advocacy and networking." The website is an

online hub where a growing community of volunteers meets, shares resources and coordinates volunteer actions in support of the Millennium Development Goals. The site also details how volunteers contribute to each of the MDG's. You can read some of their stories here: **http://www.worldvolunteerweb.org/mdgs/the-goals.html**

The continued rise of web-based tools has also made online volunteering a perfect niche for many youth-led development campaigns to evolve. Until recently, youth were often seen as being the most disengaged from civic involvement, but their readiness to embrace (and understand!) frequent technological changes has given them the chance to utilize the potential of the Web for the promulgation of socially-conscious initiatives around the globe.

Lance Bennett's study of the "digital natives", people born after 1980s and for whom the Internet was always a presence in their lives, explains why youth have become the most active contributors to online volunteering. Young people, he explains, want to contribute, but they see their roles differently from their elders and thus have found new sites of civic learning that are no longer confined to the walls of a school or the halls of a bureaucratic institution. For this reason, "increasing numbers of young people spend time in online environments, many of which offer opportunities that are more in tune with the appeal of social networking and participatory media creation." **(2)**

With online tools as ubiquitous as they have become, it is relatively easy for interested youth to locate and become involved in causes they feel a deep affiliation for. As explained in Bennet's "engaged youth paradigm" **(3)** there now is a rich world of online networks that provides youth with the tools and connections they need to define themselves as fully aware and engaged in civic responsibilities… so the chances of affecting change are greater than ever!

1.   Project Gutenberg **www.gutenberg.org/wiki/Main_Page**
2-3.   Bennett, Lance W., Chris Wells, and Allison Rank. (2008) Young Citizens and Civic Learning: Two Paradigms of Citizenship in the Digital Age. Center for Communication & Civic Engagement.University of Washington, USA, p. 6

2. Personal Change

Volunteerism has many social benefits, but it is also an activity that can enrich you as an individual and contribute to your personal growth. Read how online volunteering has had an impact on Jennifer, Noel, Amanda and Mariel.

Mariel is a TakingITGlobal volunteer whose passion and enthusiasm are truly contagious! She was a volunteer Community Animator for TIG's Youth Media Exchange platform (www.ymex.org) and is now involved with our Spanish team!

1. Can you tell us a bit about yourself?

My name is Mariel, I am 19 years old and I live in Mexico City. I am currently studying philosophy in university. Aside from philosophy, I am interested in cultural and social studies, digital media, gymnastics, dance and activism.

2. How did you become an online volunteer?

My path to online volunteering began in 2004, when I was 14, and got to attend a conference at the Mexican offices of the UN where I learned more about the organization's work. The conference had caught my attention, so I joined UNICEF's online community, Voices of Youth, and started meeting people from different cultures and learning more about global issues. I immediately developed an interest in digital media and global issues, and started jumping from community to community until, in late 2006, I helped plan an event in Second Life to raise awareness on UNICEF's work. That's how it all began for me.

3. What kind of tasks do you normally perform?

I have done event-planning in virtual worlds, helped moderate discussions in discussion boards, done media-making activities to raise awareness on global issues, spoken in conferences about the use of digital media & youth, I have translated, worked on e-community building and website administration. All of them, media creation and community building in particular, have been very fulfilling!

4. What are your overall thoughts on the experience?

I think that I have been very lucky in my experiences because, despite an initial two years of trawling the web in search for opportunities and figuring out my place in the net, I was able to find many outstanding groups and organizations that are genuinely working to make things better for people. The experience has inspired me enough to make me want to devote at least a part of my career to social issues. I think this field leaves a lot of room for

personal development, though of course the challenge remains finding a way to reconcile my activism with my studies and my other interests.

5. Is there anything else you'd like to share with us?

I think that online activism has made it much easier for many people to volunteer. Most of the time, big amounts of resources are not needed, and I am sure that there is a lot of online work to do in every single cause that may be supported by any individual - so I recommend it as a practice to virtually any person who has an Internet connection!

Amanda is a young volunteer from Brazil with a passion for making connections and making a difference. She has been a member of the TakingITGlobal community since 2007

1. Can you tell us a bit about yourself?

My name is Amanda, I'm Brazilian and I come from a city called Uberlandia, which is a bit far from the shore and the beaches that my country is known for! I'm 20 years old and I have a true passion for meeting people, establishing meaningful connections and listening to others.

2. How did you become an online volunteer?

There was a show on TV on how young people found a way to make their voice heard and to speak for themselves, it showed examples of youth working to change the world and how TakingITGlobal was helping them do that. When I saw this I thought, "Wow, that's something that I can see myself being a part of" especially since I have always been interested in issues that were not very common for a person my age, things like politics, economics, and philosophy. The show motivated me to find an organization I could contribute to, one that would also allow me to connect with others, gain exposure to other cultures and exchange ideas and resources with people sharing my same interests. I wanted something that would enrich my life- and the idea of meeting other young people with similar (or different!) views of the world sounded very appealing to me. When I saw the volunteering opportunity posted on TIG I signed up, sent a resume and everything fell into place. Now I have been with TIG for over a year and a half!

### 3. What kind of tasks do you normally perform?

My tasks are related to the Multilingual Community, Portuguese in particular. I read content submitted by TIG members or related to particular global issues and translate them. I do this so that more Portuguese-speaking youth can benefit from what TIG has to offer.

4. What are your overall thoughts on the experience?

For me the whole experience has been great, I get to learn more about many different issues and meet other young people from around the world that I never would have otherwise been able to meet. For this reason, I would like to thank the TIG community for sharing its stories and experiences with all of us! Everything that I have read so far on the topic of youth involvement in global issues has been really enriching.

5. Is there anything else you'd like to add?

What I can say is that if anyone else, like me, believes that young people can make a difference in the world, then they should never believe otherwise! Don't be any less of what you can be and feel you want to be: pursue your goals, invest in your dreams, just keep in mind that we are all conected, and that the important things may be the ones we often take for granted. Remember to live your life completely.
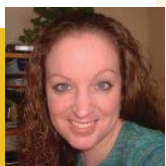
Jennifer joined NABUUR in early 2008. She has contributed to countless projects, and currently serves as online project manager for a handful of projects, mainly focusing on disabilities issues. In her excerpt, Jennifer shares with us how she became involved and her experiences with online volunteering thus far.

"My name is Jennifer Wells. I am from the United States and have a Bachelor's Degree in Psychology and a Master's Degree in Rehabilitation Counseling from Kent State University. I am employed as a vocational rehabilitation counselor. My job focuses on working with people with disabilities and coordinating training and/ or other types of support services to help them obtain employment.

"In the summer of 2007, I began seriously looking at different opportunities to expand and use my skill set. I wanted to find an opportunity to work with a program in a developing country focused on improving the lives of people with disabilities. I knew that there was online education, so I decided to search for online volunteering on a whim. I had never heard of volunteering online, but was pleasantly surprised to find the United Nations Online Volunteering website.

"I registered and went through every opportunity, eventually coming across exactly what I had been looking for- Help Grace Association Pakistan Develop a Disability Resource Center. I had found my opportunity, but found myself scared. I waited for several weeks before finally making contact with the organization and was plagued by doubts and questions such as "what if I don't know enough?" and "will I really be able to make an impact without ever having been on the ground in Pakistan?" To put my fears to rest, I decided to just dive in and was very glad that I did.

"Once this project was completed, I came to know Nabuur via various opportunities posted on the UNV site. I found Nabuur to be a virtual "one-stop shop" of opportunities, joined and have been there ever since. In the summer of 2009, I worked as a project coordinator for Triune Uganda, a project aimed at raising public awareness of waterborne disease, malaria and HIV/AIDS in Uganda by improving collaboration among the church, traditional healers and the medical community.

"Cross-cultural communication and language barriers can be the two hardest challenges to overcome with respect to online volunteering. Many of the projects that I have been involved in are in areas where access to electricity is inconsistent at best. Patience, persistence, and constant communication about progress or lack of progress are critical.

"Project definition is also very important. Many times projects are not as clearly defined as they should be and there is an immediate focus on fundraising versus evaluation of starting from where you are with the resources that you have. Communication and sharing of ideas across all cultures on a consistent basis has been critical in removing barriers and moving projects forward.

"Online volunteering expands your world view. It improves your communication skills and expands your personal network and skills in ways you would not necessarily think are possible. Through Nabuur, I have made many new friends that I would have never had the opportunity to get to know apart from my experience as an online volunteer. It has been the right mix of challenge and opportunity for growth. The volunteers at Nabuur have become an extended "online family."

"To anyone considering becoming an online volunteer, but nagged by the same doubts and fears that I had, I would encourage you to jump in and try. I guarantee you will walk away changed for the good."

Noel joined NABUUR almost three years ago. Since he first became involved, he has supported various online projects, including facilitating a project in Uganda working to set up a vocational training centre for youth in the community. Below Noel shares his experiences and what made him decide to become an online volunteer.

"Some time ago, after completing my degree, I found necessary to increase my international awareness while involving myself in doing something useful and meaningful. Being aware that my time was already pretty squeezed and that I was unable to physically travel to help those people with needs, my aim was to find something that would help me providing my knowledge and resources to those who are not as lucky as I am, by allowing me to continue with my daily routine. After a quick search I came across Nabuur and decided to give it a try, curious about their innovative approach. Three years later, I am still very happy I took that decision.

"Challenges drive my daily life, and online volunteering is not lacking them. By positioning myself as Facilitator, or Online Project Manager, I discovered that –in comparison with old-style projects- motivation was key, rather than timing. Dealing with a team of culturally diverse people is not always an easy task, and if this happens online the challenge increases substantially.

"To overcome these differences with offline projects, organization and friendliness need to come together. Planning and a sense of fair leadership are important, of course, as well as clear ideas and plain communication, but so it is giving a personal touch to the relationship facilitator/volunteer. From my point of view, that is what makes Nabuur unique, the fact that, while improving the life of others, one is able to enjoy incredible moments with people I would have never been able to meet were not for this nonprofit.

"At Nabuur, becoming a friend with your peers is many times more important than delivering a perfect product. And this, compared with other initiatives, makes a difference. In my three years as volunteer I have learned invaluable lessons both from those who are living in underdeveloped countries and from those others that, like me, are using their free time to help the ones that need it more.

"In conclusion, I must say I have never come across an organization that is willing to sacrifice so much for the good of their volunteers and projects, fighting for their values. They have taught me a lot, and I am glad I once felt adventurous and decided to click on their 'Sign up' button."

I am so glad I was fortunate enough to discover the existence of TakingITGlobal. The variety of information on this website actually broadens my perspective of the world. Of course, being an English-Chinese translator also provides me with the great opportunity to utilize my bilingual skills and make a contribution. Being a member of the translation team allows me to know people around the world… and I now have friends residing in China and France
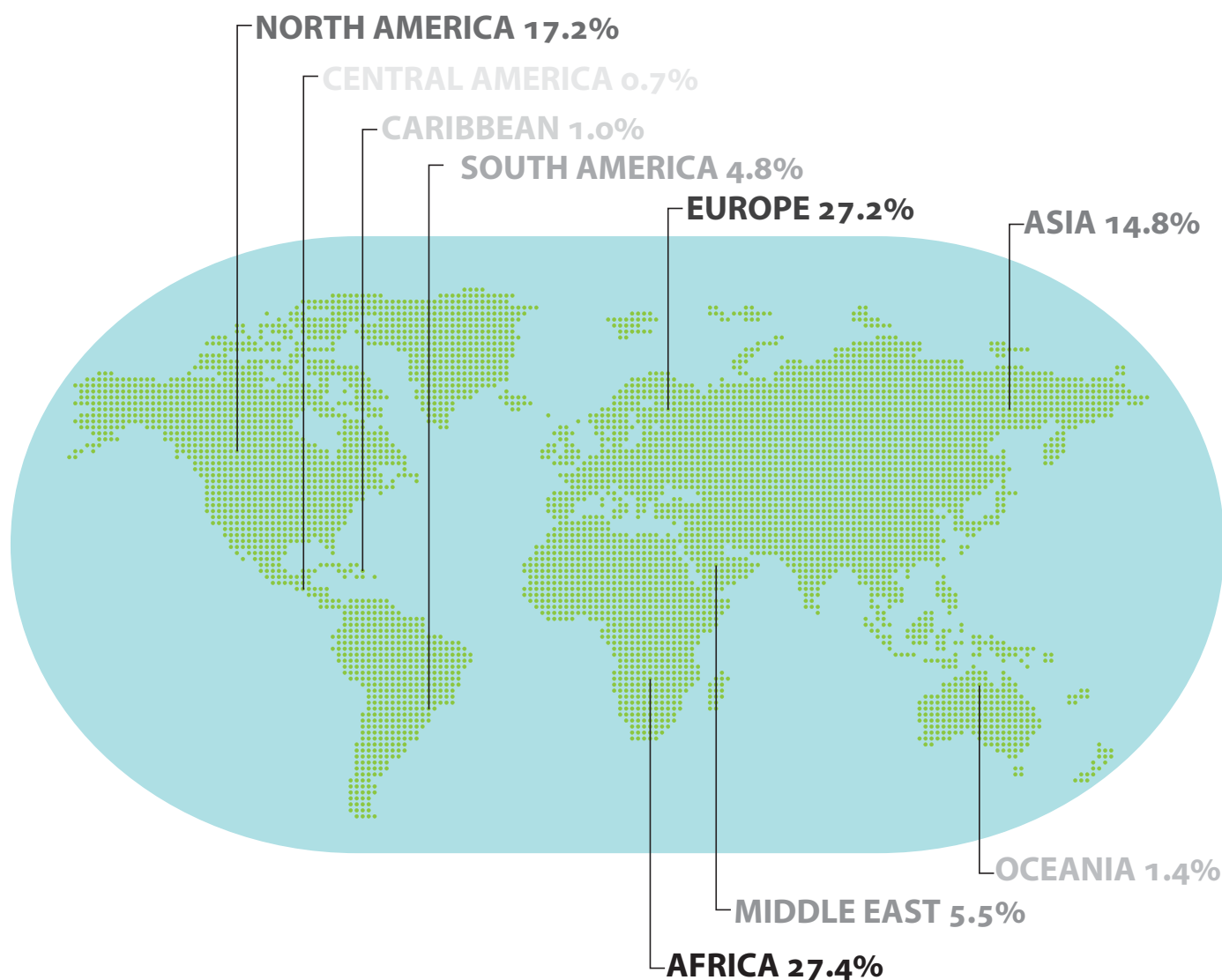
–Jessica Zou

"Volunteerism is a highly dynamic and exciting field. It is both responsive to societal trends and a leader of those trends.
-Dr. Jeffrey Brudney

Geographic location of online volunteers in the youth-led development sector

NORTH AMERICA 17.2%

CENTRAL AMERICA 0.7%

CARIBBEAN 1.0%

SOUTH AMERICA 4.8%

EUROPE 27.2%

ASIA 14.8%

OCEANIA 1.4%

MIDDLE EAST 5.5%

AFRICA 27.4%

Source: Volunteering 2.0: On-line Volunteering Practices in the International Youth-Led Development Sector, a study conducted in collaboration with TakingITGlobal

RESOURCES

Websites

TakingITGlobal
TakingITGlobal is an international organization, led by youth and enabled by technology, that connects youth to find inspiration, information and involvement in their local and global communities. Headquartered in Toronto, Canada, with a growing worldwide presence, the organization's flagship program is tigweb.org, the most popular online community for young people interested in connecting across cultures and making a difference, with hundreds of thousands of visitors each month.

Nabuur
Nabuur.com is an online volunteering platform that links Neighbours (online volunteers) with Villages (local communities) in Africa, Asia and Latin America. Connected through Nabuur.com, Neighbours and local communities learn about each other, share ideas and find solutions to local issues.
www.nabuur.com

United Nations Volunteers
The United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme is the UN organization that contributes to peace and development through volunteerism worldwide. UNV contributes to peace and development by advocating for recognition of volunteers, working with partners to integrate volunteerism into development programming, and mobilizing an increasing number and diversity of volunteers, including experienced UNV volunteers, throughout the world.
www.unv.org and **www.onlinevolunteering.org**

World Volunteer Web
The World Volunteer Web supports the volunteer community by serving as a global clearinghouse for information and resources linked to volunteerism that can be used for campaigning, advocacy and networking. It is an online hub where the community can meet, share resources and coordinate activities to mobilize volunteer action in support of the Millennium Development Goals. With a constituency comprising of over 20,000 organizations and individuals, the World Volunteer Web helps to catalyze partnerships among volunteer stakeholders from all continents.
www.worldvolunteerweb.org

Idealist
Idealist is a project of Action Without Borders, a nonprofit organization founded in 1995 with offices in the United States and Argentina. Idealist is an interactive site where people and organizations can exchange resources and ideas, locate opportunities and supporters, and take steps toward building a world where all people can lead free and dignified lives.
www.idealist.org

International Association for Volunteer Effort

The International Association for Volunteer Effort (IAVE) was founded in 1970 by a group of volunteers from around the world who saw in volunteering a means of making connections across countries and cultures. It has grown into a global network of volunteers, volunteer organisations, national representatives and volunteer centres, with members in over 70 countries, and in all world regions
www.iave.org

Time Banking

Time Banking is a social change movement in 22 countries and six continents. For every hour you spend doing something for someone in your community, you earn one Time Dollar. Then you have a Time Dollar to spend on having someone do something for you.
www.timebanks.org/international.htm

Volunteer Match

VolunteerMatch strengthens communities by making it easier for good people and good causes to connect. The organization offers a variety of online services to support a community of nonprofit, volunteer and business leaders committed to civic engagement.
www.volunteermatch.org/about/

The Extraordinaries

The Extraordinaries is a micro-volunteering platform that allows organizations to engage their supporters via micro-actions, done on-demand and on-the-spot using a mobile phone or web browser.
www.beextra.org

WorldWide Volunteering

The WWV website provides instant access to information about a wide range of volunteering opportunities throughout the UK and worldwide, and has over 150 virtual volunteering opportunities available on their database of 1500+ organizations.
wwv.org.uk/Volunteer.asp

Publications

Bennett, Lance W., Chris Wells, and Allison Rank. (2008) Young Citizens and Civic Learning: Two Paradigms of Citizenship in the Digital Age.
http://www.engagedyouth.org/blog/wp-content/uploads/2008/08/youngcitizens_clo_finalaug_l.pdf

Center for Communication and Civic Engagement
http://www.engagedyouth.org/research/

Commission on the Future of Volunteering, Manifesto for Change
http://www.volunteering.org.uk/NR/rdonlyres/0B8EC40C-C9C5-454B-B212-C8918EF543F0/0/ Manifesto_final.pdf

Gaines, Sarah. Virtual Volunteers, Real Results. The Guardian, 2 June 2008
http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/2008/jun/02/volunteering.voluntarysector

United Nations Economic and Social Council, Commission for Social Development, Thirty-ninth Session: The role of volunteerism in the promotion of social development (E/CN.5/2001/6).
http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/csd/2001.htm

Volunteering and Social Activism: Pathways for Participation in Human Development.(2008) CIVICUS, IAVE and UNV joint publication.
http://www.unv.org/fileadmin/img/wvw/Volunteerism-FINAL.pdf

UNDP Essentials: "Volunteerism and Development" (2003)
http://www.undp.org/eo/documents/essentials/volunteerism.pdf

Further Reading

The UNDP November 2003 issue of "Essentials" focuses on "Volunteerism and Development", you can download a free PDF copy at http://www.undp.org/eo/documents/essentials/volunteerism.pdf

Virtual Volunteering Guidebook (2000) by Susan J. Ellis and Jayne Cravens: http://www.serviceleader. org/new/documents/vvguide.pdf

Virtual Volunteering: Current Stats and Future Prospects (2002), Vic Murray and Yvonne Harrison

http://nonprofitscan.imaginecanada.ca/files/nonprofitscan/en/iyv/murray_sr2_english_web.pdf

International Days related to online volunteering:

May 17

Information Society Day

May 21

World Day of Cultural Diversity for Dialogue and Development

August 12

International Youth Day

September 21

International Day of Peace

November 16

International Day for Tolerance

December 5

International Volunteer Day for Economic and Social Development