

NORTH OF TYNE VOLUNTEERING AREA OF EXCELLENCE

VOLUNTEERING SUPPORT—DIGITAL GOOD PRACTICE GUIDE

There is a move towards increasing use of digital technology by volunteer-involving organisations. Apps, online training and video calling have all become more common. When moving to greater use of digital platforms with volunteers, there are some key considerations for organisations to take into account. This guide is intended to provide an overview for your organisation.

WHAT IS DIGITAL?

We know that lots of people struggle to understand what is meant by the term ‘digital’. The truth is, there isn’t one single definition. Catalyst, a collective of organisations and individuals that are keen to help charities respond to the changing needs and behaviours in their communities, has provided a useful definition of ‘digital’ - [What we mean by ‘digital’: a guide](#)

PLANNING FOR DIGITAL

If your organisation is thinking about increased use of digital across the organisation as a whole, as well as in relation to volunteer recruitment, support and management, the [Charity Digital Code of Practice](#) may be a useful starting point. The Code is equally relevant to registered charities and to community-based organisations. It proposes seven key areas of digital that your organisation should be thinking about to stay relevant and make impact, and provides a number of different resources to demonstrate each principle. The Code highlights the importance of risk assessment and ethical issues, and planning with the user’s needs in mind.

Make sure you have an overall plan for your communications in place for your organisation as this will enhance your digital skills. Lloyds Bank Foundation has produced a handy guide [‘Communications, Press and Influencing Guide’](#) that you can download for free to help you think about a communications plan.

CREATING A DIGITAL STRATEGY

If you do wish to develop a Digital Strategy for the whole organisation - looking at core functions such as Finance and HR that digital can support; tools that you can use to gather data about your services; communications; and use of digital to support delivery – the following may be of use:

- Charity Digital – [What Should a Digital Strategy Look Like?](#)
- Charity Digital – [How to Create the Perfect Digital Strategy](#)
- NCVO - [Digital and Technology Guides](#)
- SCVO - [Digital Guides](#)

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DIGITAL INCLUSION

Whilst more and more activities are now taking place online, Good Things Foundation notes that 10 million people in the UK are currently digitally excluded, due to lack of access to technologies, training needs, and other barriers.

When planning to increase the use of digital with volunteer teams, consider from the start how accessible the technology is to current and potential future volunteers. What will you need to put in place to ensure that all volunteers can access the information needed for their role, and to ensure equal access? Will staff and/or volunteers need information guides, training sessions or one to one support to make the switch? Will you offer reimbursement of any additional data costs for volunteers? What provisions will you make for volunteers unable to access digital?

"We have found that most volunteers are able to complete their volunteer training online, and for volunteers who are digitally excluded or face other barriers, our staff can host a group or one to one sessions. This inclusive approach has worked very well." Sead Masic, National Volunteer Manager, Changing Lives.

Useful guides on Digital Inclusion include:

- NCVO - [Tackling Barriers to Digital Change for Staff and Volunteers](#)
- SCVO - [Digital Inclusion](#)
- Good Things Foundation - [The Digital Divide](#)

USABILITY

Many organisations have produced resources based on their experience using different platforms. You can use these to help consider what might be right for your organisation.

Consider running a pilot or focus group to collect feedback from a small number of volunteers before implementing the system with a wider volunteer team. This can help to understand usability from a volunteer's perspective, and can help ensure that volunteers have the information/training they need to be able to use the system successfully.

Ensure that volunteers are aware of the reasons for using a particular tool, and share information on its benefits to the organisation/cause.

Once you have introduced the new system, ask volunteers for feedback on the new systems or processes, and review how these are being used, as well as how well they are working. Ensure that you can make changes as needed.

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You can see case studies and tips from organisations using a range of different technologies at:

- Catalyst – [Shared Digital Guides](#)
- Meridian Swift - [Volunteer Plain Talk](#)
- Better Impact – [Market your Non Profit’s Volunteer Program: 4 Critical Steps](#)

ACCESSIBILITY

When choosing apps or platforms to use with volunteers, there is a wealth of guidance on settings to make these as accessible as possible. For example, there are features on some platforms which can support translation, colour adjustment and font size adjustment, along with many other options, supporting access. See the useful links section for resources on accessibility.

[Difference North East](#) delivers ‘*Digital Accessibility Training*’ to help you ensure that all your digital and online activity does not create barriers for some people. Other sources of information include:

- Gov.UK - [Making your service accessible: an introduction](#)
- Gov.UK - [Understanding disabilities & impairments - common barriers to accessing digital services](#)
- Charity Digital – [Everything You Need to Know about Digital Inclusion in 2024](#)
- The Catalyst - [Digital accessibility Questions Answered](#)
- The Catalyst - [Learn how to be an accessible facilitator online](#)

ONLINE SAFETY

Ensure that volunteers know how to keep themselves safe online when using platforms as part of their volunteering. Volunteers may be vulnerable to:

- cyber security attacks such as phishing scams or exposure to malware;
- online harassment as representatives of the organisation;
- sharing information about themselves and service users

Volunteers should be aware of how to adjust their privacy settings, where applicable, and your organisation should provide further guidance relevant to specific platforms being used. This can be included in your organisation’s induction pack or volunteer handbook, alongside appropriate training in data privacy.

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Remember that some volunteers may be more at risk online. Ensure that appropriate safeguards are in place.

Useful guides include:

National Cyber Security Centre - [Top tips for staying secure online](#)

VONNE - Safer Culture North East – [Safeguarding for Online Services](#)

AVA (Against Violence and Abuse) - [Digital Safeguarding Resource Pack](#)

NSPCC - [Online Safety Guidance example policy](#)

Free Safeguarding training is also available on the [Elements Training Portal](#)

See also:

- GDPR, Data protection and Volunteers
- Using Social Media to keep in touch with your Volunteers and promote your Volunteering Opportunities
- Using Messaging Apps to keep in touch with your Volunteers
- Using Online Meeting Platforms to keep in touch with your Volunteers

