Designing virtual volunteering programs for young people

Playbook | November 2020

Disclaimer

This playbook was developed by Pledges for Change in partnership with Volunteer Toronto. **It is intended to serve as a guide for non-profit groups (including non-profit organizations, charities and community grassroots groups) looking to create, improve, and/or enhance their youth (under 18) virtual volunteering programming.** *The reader should not rely solely on the playbook's content to make decisions.*

About

PLEDGES FOR CHANGE

Pledges for Change is a youth-led, grassroots non-profit on a mission to reimagine how young Canadians engage in volunteering.

Since 2013, 5,000+ youth and 100+ private, public, and social sector partners have been involved with the organization's initiatives. These youth have collectively contributed 27,000+ hours of volunteer service to communities across Canada.

For more information, visit www.pledgesforchange.com.

Volunteer toronto

Volunteer Toronto is Canada's largest volunteer centre, with over 40 years of experience connecting volunteers to the organizations that need them.

The organization's services empower local volunteers to find opportunities that make a positive difference in their community. Through in-person and online training, Volunteer Toronto also educates and helps non-profit organizations and community groups run successful volunteer programs.

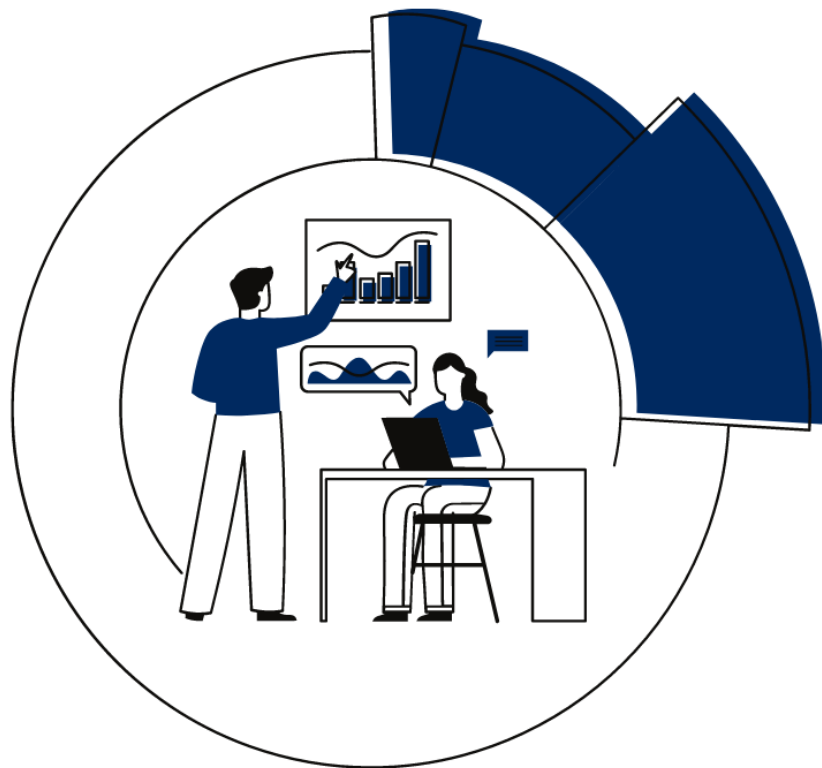For more information, visit www.volunteertoronto.ca.

Questions or feedback? Get in touch with us!

Amanda Wu, *Pledges for Change*
amanda@pledgesforchange.com

Iona Frost, *Volunteer Toronto*
ifrost@volunteertoronto.ca

Playbook overview

Establish "why"
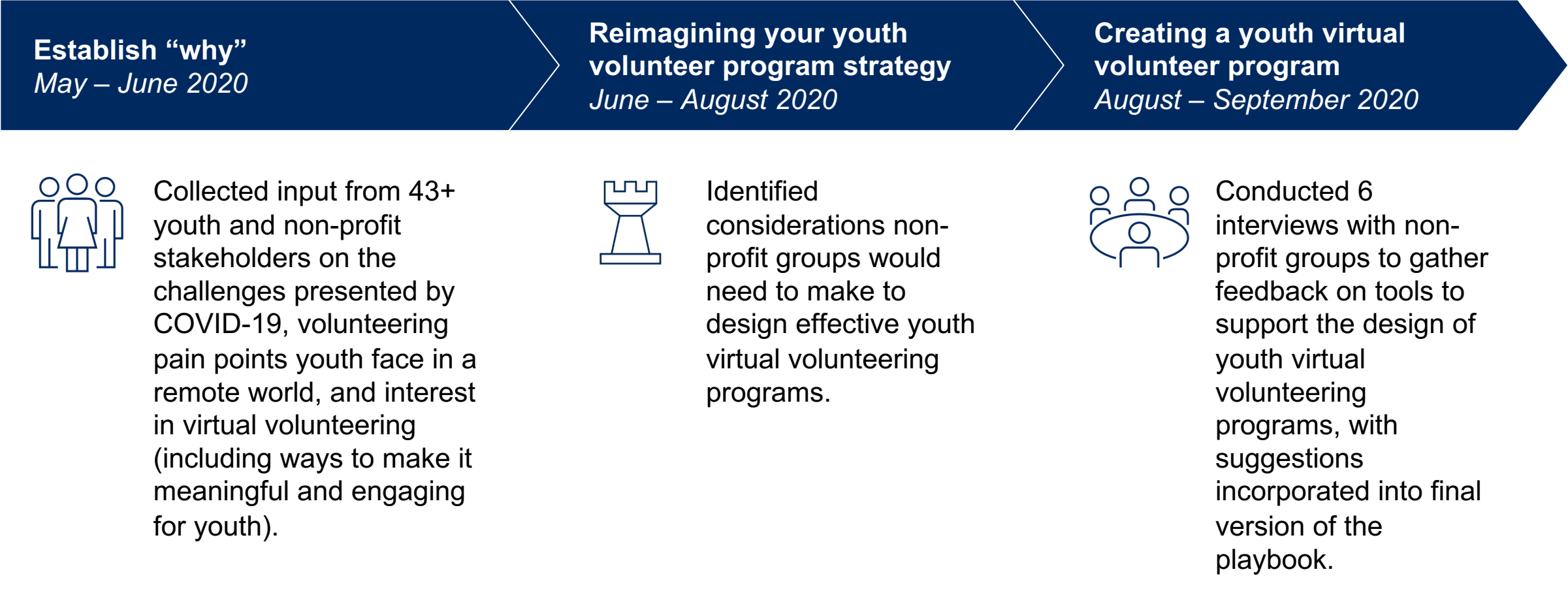
Reimagining your youth volunteer program strategy

Creating a youth virtual volunteering program

This playbook was created to support non-profit groups design and deploy effective youth virtual volunteering programs

Objectives

Design

- **Establish "why"** it's important for non-profits to consider offering virtual volunteering opportunities for young people (< 18 yrs. old)

- Share tools to support non-profit groups in **re-imagining their youth volunteer programs through a virtual lens**

Deploy

- Provide best practices, frameworks, and case studies to enable non-profit groups to **deploy effective virtual volunteering programs for young people**

Expected outcomes

- Deeper understanding for **why offering youth virtual volunteering opportunities will be important** during COVID-19 and beyond

- Refreshed youth volunteer program strategies that have a **stronger virtual focus**

- Creation of **meaningful and engaging youth virtual volunteering programs**

Development of this playbook spanned over four months

Establish "why" *May – June 2020*	Reimagining your youth volunteer program strategy *June – August 2020*	Creating a youth virtual volunteer program *August – September 2020*

Collected input from 43+ youth and non-profit stakeholders on the challenges presented by COVID-19, volunteering pain points youth face in a remote world, and interest in virtual volunteering (including ways to make it meaningful and engaging for youth).

Identified considerations non-profit groups would need to make to design effective youth virtual volunteering programs.

Conducted 6 interviews with non-profit groups to gather feedback on tools to support the design of youth virtual volunteering programs, with suggestions incorporated into final version of the playbook.

Many thanks to the non-profit groups and youth that contributed to the development of this playbook.

Playbook overview

Objectives	Summary (details in following pages)

A **Establish "why"**

- COVID-19 has posed numerous challenges for non-profit groups; **one of these challenges is to figure out how we meaningfully engage volunteers remotely**
- **An important group of volunteers, youth (<18 yrs. old), are looking to give back through volunteering now more than ever**, which carries a mutual benefit for youth and non-profits
- **Young volunteers are excited about volunteering remotely**, but are struggling to access virtual opportunities that align to their interests

B **Reimagining your youth volunteer program strategy**

- Non-profit leaders will need to **adopt a new set of considerations when determining how to design effective virtual volunteering programs for youth**: (1) intended programming impact, (2) youth volunteering barriers, (3) youth volunteer recruitment, and (4) other virtual volunteering considerations

C **Creating a youth virtual volunteering program**

- **There are five steps across the volunteer management lifecycle that non-profit groups will need to adapt when offering virtual volunteering opportunities:** planning roles; position descriptions; promoting and recruiting; orientation, training, and supervision; closing and getting feedback
- **Non-profit groups have already begun to experiment with virtual volunteering:** Volunteer Toronto & Young People's Theatre (case studies provided)

Playbook overview

A COVID-19 has created a strong case for virtual volunteering, both in the immediate and long term

Impacts of COVID-19 on Canada's non-profit groups

Long-term implications for volunteerism

Financial health

- **Projected $9.5-17.5B loss in revenues** (i.e., through declines in donations, fundraising, earned income operations)
  - Will likely need to **furlough 117,000-195,000 staff** in 2020

*"We have had to cancel and rethink our in-person fundraisers, **which were an important revenue stream.**"*

Limitations to supporting beneficiaries

- As a result of social distancing measures, **some of the supports that organizations used to provide can no longer be offered**

*"As most of our services are in-person, **we have had to temporarily halt all activities and meetings.**"*

Safety of staff and volunteers

- Organizations have had to **significantly transform their operating models** to help curb the spread of COVID-19
  - **Remote volunteering will likely continue to be common** for staff and volunteers

*"[COVID-19] is a **huge lesson for everyone to be willing and ready to accept change.**"*

- As non-profit groups continue to adapt, **they will likely need to lean more heavily on volunteers**
- The move to remote ways of working will likely remain beyond COVID-19; **non-profit groups will need to fundamentally shift how they engage volunteers**
  - Many volunteer opportunities will need to be offered virtually

Non-profit groups should strongly consider developing and offering virtual volunteering programs, now and beyond

A It's important that non-profit groups engage young people through virtual volunteering programs

Young volunteers are significant contributors to the non-profit sector and it is important engage them early

- The latest *General Social Survey on Giving, Volunteering, and Participating* found that, for more than a decade, **Canadian youth have contributed more hours than any other age group**
  - **53% of Canadians aged 15-24** are involved in volunteer activities[1]

- Young people are **excited to develop through volunteering**;
  - Volunteering provides young people with unique opportunities to develop valuable skills, self-esteem, and confidence

Non-profits also benefit greatly from engaging young volunteers

- Young volunteers will often have different perspectives on ideas, allowing organizations to **innovate and creatively solve problems**

- Volunteers add capacity for non-profits in meaningful ways

- Empowering people to become life-long givers starts at a young age; **adults decide whether to volunteer based on the experiences they had volunteering as youth**

A # Youth face many challenges when it comes to virtual volunteering, this affects how non-profits will need to design their virtual volunteering programs

Key challenges

Opportunity availability	▪ Youth are excited to volunteer virtually, but there are a **limited number of virtual volunteer opportunities available** to young people, **particularly ones that are meaningful and exciting for youth**

Opportunity awareness	▪ **Schools used to be the primary place** for youth to learn about volunteering (e.g., guidance counsellors)
	  − **With COVID-19, it is now harder to get information about volunteering** through school
	  − **School boards are not as focused on promoting virtual volunteer opportunities**
	
	▪ Youth **typically look for volunteer opportunities on social media**, but many youth find that some non-profit groups are not very active on their favorite platforms
	  − As a result, many opportunities may exist but youth are not aware

What we heard from 30+ youth volunteers

*"I have all the resources needed to volunteer, **now I just need the opportunities**."*

*"Virtual volunteer opportunities cater towards those who can provide immediate support, **which usually requires skills that I cannot provide** [i.e. requires a driver's license or vulnerable sector check]. **I'd love to help these organizations, but I have no options**."*

*"In the past, my **guidance counsellors have helped me find opportunities**, even when I wasn't looking. **This isn't the case anymore**."*

*"I normally try to look for organizations and opportunities for volunteering on Instagram, **but recently I haven't found any there**."*

*"What makes me excited about volunteering is the **opportunity to meet incredible people who share similar passions and interests as I do to make the world a better place**… sometimes, that hasn't been as present in opportunities I've been involved with."*

A Non-profit groups will also have to address three challenges in order to offer effective youth virtual volunteering programs

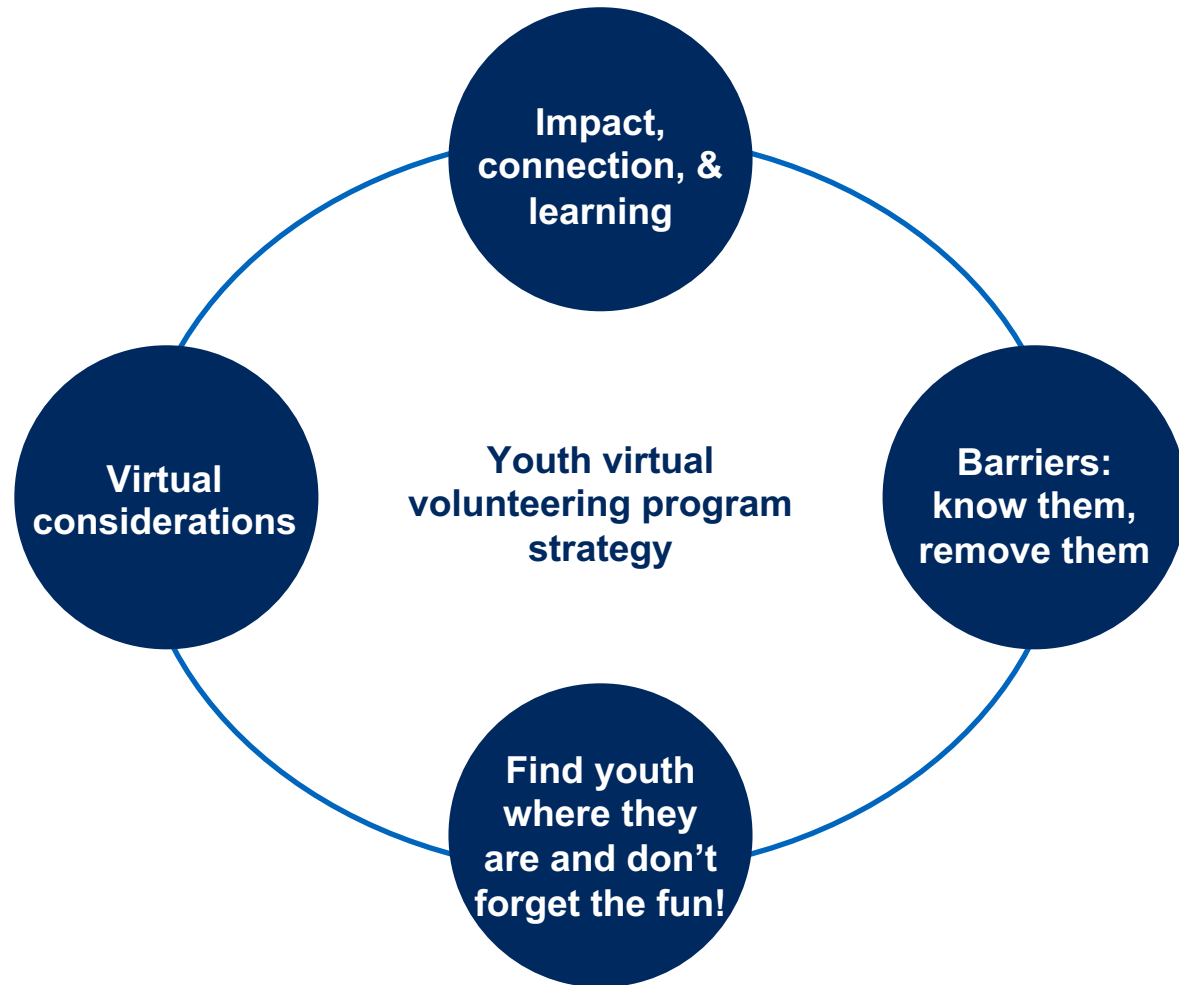| Key challenges		What we heard from 13 non-profit leaders
Designing virtual volunteering programs	▪ **Many traditional youth volunteer opportunities were in-person**, which have become unavailable due to COVID-19 — Non-profit groups are now unsure how best to **involve and recruit young volunteers**	*"We could really use the help of volunteers, but we've only involved youth in in-person fundraising activities in the past… **we're not really sure how to involve young people in volunteer activities outside of collecting donations**."* *"Most of our volunteer activities are on hold… **many of our volunteers supported in-person events and fundraisers**, which are not currently running."*
Remote / digital mindset	▪ Remote volunteering is still relatively new for many non-profit groups; **using digital tools may not been a priority in the past** — **Some volunteer program staff may not be comfortable using technology**, or know how to use these tools effectively (e.g., video chat software)	*"[Going remote] is new territory for everyone, so whether you're a manager or a volunteer, **you should expect to hit some roadblocks…**"* *"Some organizations may face the temptation to cut down on capacity or stop operations. This may be right for your organization but **you must evaluate if there is a possibility of leveraging technology to continue servicing your community**."*
Keeping virtual volunteers engaged	▪ Many non-profit groups that were successful at engaging young volunteers in-person must now **develop virtual strategies to keep young volunteers excited about engaging with them**	*"The world has gone more digital because of COVID-19… it's now **more important than ever for everyone to be willing and ready to over-invest in staying connected to your networks**, including sponsors, donors, beneficiaries, volunteers, and staff."* *"It's crucial to not leave volunteers in the dark when they're involved with your organization… **they will feel disengaged and less excited to volunteer**."*

Playbook overview

Establish "why"

(B) Reimagining your youth volunteer program strategy

Creating a youth virtual volunteering program

Impact, connection, & learning

Virtual considerations

Youth virtual volunteering program strategy

Barriers: know them, remove them

Find youth where they are and don't forget the fun!

1. Impact, connection, & learning:
When it comes to role development, promotion, supervision and recognition, demonstrating impact, building strong relationships, and creating learning opportunities are important for a youth.

2. Barriers - know them, remove them:
Youth face unique barriers to volunteering that must be considered when building a strategy.

3. Find youth where they are and don't forget the fun:
When thinking of promotion, training, supervision or recognition, it's important to engage youth in the spaces they are most comfortable. It's also important to remember that volunteering should be a fun and engaging experience for youth.

4. Virtual considerations:
What are some other considerations we need to think about when designing youth virtual volunteer programs? What changes between a virtual and physical volunteer opportunity?

Youth perspectives should exist at the core of any youth virtual volunteering program strategy. Program strategies that exclude youth input tend to construct unnecessary barriers to youth engagement and often make false assumptions about the needs, wants and expectations of youth volunteers.

B Impact, connection, and learning

Focus on impact

Volunteer opportunities, promotional material and recognition tactics should reflect the impact that a youth volunteer is making (or will make) to fulfill the non-profit's mission.
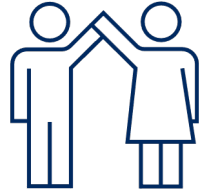
Building thriving environments

Building strong relationships through effective communication, engaging training and meaningful recognition will create a sense of safety that can allow youth volunteers to thrive. Collecting feedback is an important way organizations can continue to improve on this aspect.

Developing important skills

Many young people volunteer as a way to learn new skills or build on existing ones. In role development and promotion, it's important to establish and highlight the learning opportunities within volunteer roles.
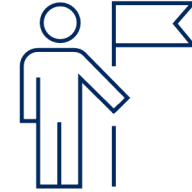
Growing leaders of tomorrow

Building paths to leadership for youth volunteers not only facilitates leadership growth and creative thinking, but is also a great strategy for developing long-term engagement.

B Barriers – know them, remove them

| Barrier	Description	Potential solutions
School	Volunteer programs that offer opportunities during the school year are more likely to conflict with high-stress times for youth	▪ Be cognizant of high-stress times for students, and plan volunteer experiences accordingly (e.g., short-term volunteer opportunities during school breaks)
Cost	Any cost attached to a youth volunteering opportunity creates a barrier, as a significant number of students do not have disposable income	▪ Thoroughly evaluate your youth volunteering opportunity to remove any unnecessary costs
Role exclusion	Age limits on some volunteer roles are unnecessary, and may discourage youth from engaging (especially if it is not clear that youth could participate)	▪ Ensure that the age limit on your volunteer roles are necessary, otherwise, always indicate that the role is available for youth
Application & screening	Unclear and time-consuming volunteer application processes can discourage many young people from participating in the experience	▪ Simplify your application process. Some requirements for adults may be less effective or unnecessary for youth (ex. resumes).The less paperwork the better – digital is best
Assumptions	Assumptions about youth volunteers may not be true, and could lead to negative experiences	▪ Ask and clarify when in doubt

B Find youth where they are and don't forget the fun

Schools are the best place to find youth volunteers – promote your volunteer opportunity through local school administrations or student networks (e.g., student council).
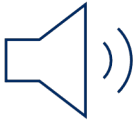
Friend recommendations are still the best referral system for youth volunteering – tap into youth volunteer networks.

Training sessions for youth volunteers should be engaging and include skills development – creating interactive activities to facilitate learning is important.

Digital volunteer communities can provide effective and engaging ways to share information and build strong volunteer-volunteer and volunteer-organization connections. **As much as possible, rely on volunteers to guide how these communities are formed.**

Research shows that a positive volunteering experience in youth is the greatest determinant of a life-long volunteer. Give volunteers opportunities to go out and try something new and fun; incorporating opportunities to have good food and casually socialize goes a long way in recognition, relationship-building, and volunteer engagement.

B Virtual considerations

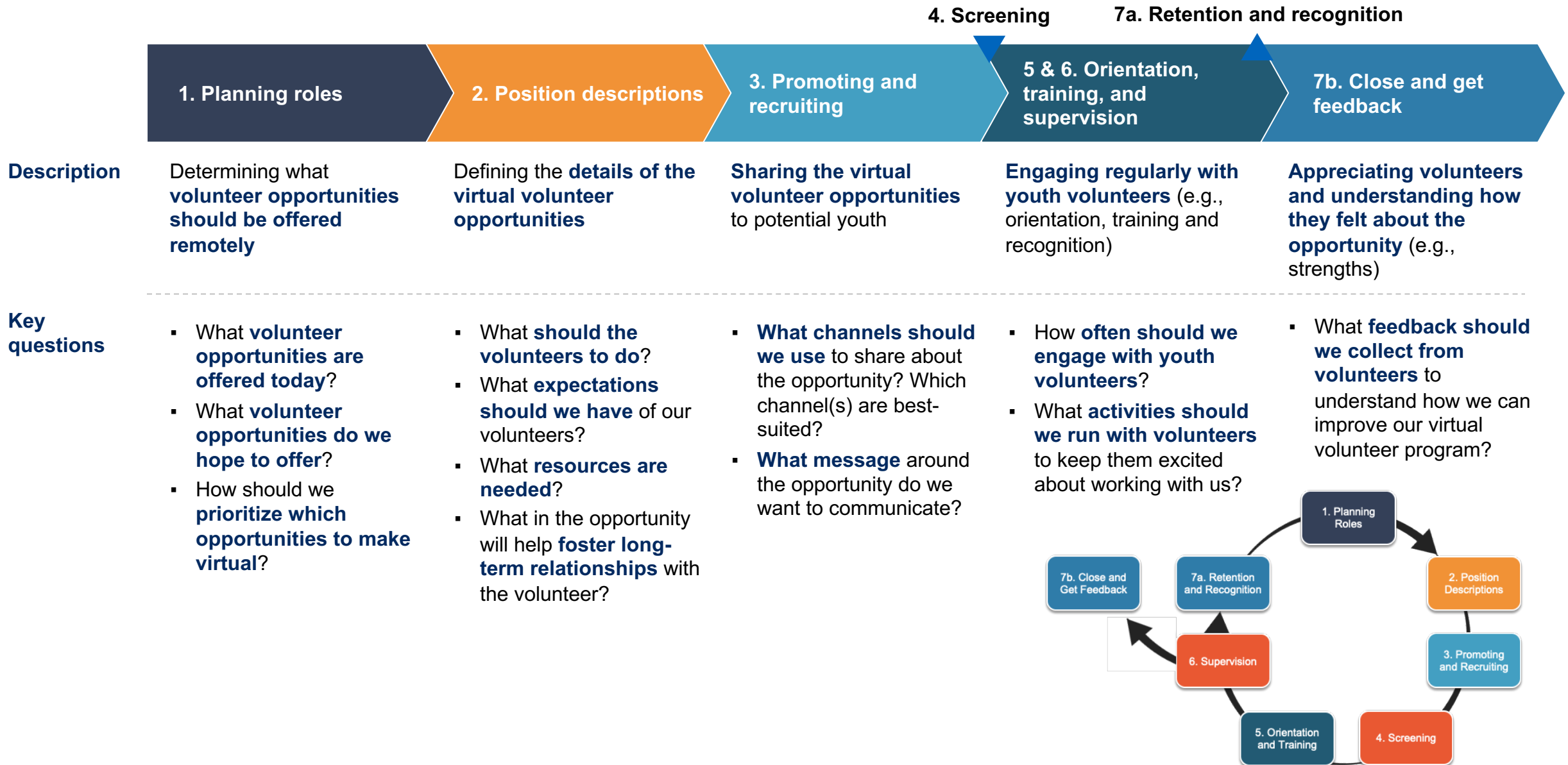| **Maintaining connectivity while volunteering remotely**	**Developing engaging online trainings** – recorded videos likely will not do the trick anymore **Strong systems** for tracking progress/hours, getting feedback and doing follow-ups **Creating digital communities to build connections with volunteers remotely** – without oversaturation that could cause fatigue **Regularly engaging with volunteers,** both within and outside of their volunteer activities – important to ensure volunteers do not feel alone in their work and disconnected from the organization and the mission
Adjusting to micro-volunteering trends	**Awareness and commitment to being more flexible on length of volunteer opportunity will attract a greater number of volunteers** (many organizations are currently stuck in a "set it and forget it" approach) - Non-profit groups must identify and create tasks that can be **easily completed by youth volunteers in short periods of time** - Non-profit groups that embrace micro-volunteering will become more **nimble and responsive to the needs of the communities they serve** - Volunteer Toronto research **suggests youth are more receptive to the micro-volunteering concept** - Non-profit groups have **limited resources for "big projects"** (even more so since COVID-19), but still need to be responsive and relevant
Ensuring cyber safety	**Virtual volunteer programs require systems to ensure safety and privacy**, from adequate supervision to platform selection and protocols – click here to learn more

Playbook overview

Establish "why"

Reimagining your youth
volunteer program strategy

C **Creating a youth virtual
volunteering program**

C There are seven steps in a typical youth volunteer management cycle

	1. Planning roles	2. Position descriptions	3. Promoting and recruiting	4. Screening → 5 & 6. Orientation, training, and supervision	7a. Retention and recognition → 7b. Close and get feedback
Description	Determining what **volunteer opportunities should be offered remotely**	Defining the **details of the virtual volunteer opportunities**	**Sharing the virtual volunteer opportunities** to potential youth	**Engaging regularly with youth volunteers** (e.g., orientation, training and recognition)	**Appreciating volunteers and understanding how they felt about the opportunity** (e.g., strengths)
Key questions	▪ What **volunteer opportunities are offered today**? ▪ What **volunteer opportunities do we hope to offer**? ▪ How should we **prioritize which opportunities to make virtual**?	▪ What **should the volunteers to do**? ▪ What **expectations should we have** of our volunteers? ▪ What **resources are needed**? ▪ What in the opportunity will help **foster long-term relationships** with the volunteer?	▪ **What channels should we use** to share about the opportunity? Which channel(s) are best-suited? ▪ **What message** around the opportunity do we want to communicate?	▪ How **often should we engage with youth volunteers**? ▪ What **activities should we run with volunteers** to keep them excited about working with us?	▪ What **feedback should we collect from volunteers** to understand how we can improve our virtual volunteer program?

20

C There are 5+1 tools that could be used to help create a youth virtual volunteering program

Tool	Relevant step in volunteer management lifecycle	Description	Page(s) in playbook
1 **Virtual volunteer opportunity prioritization matrix**	**Planning roles (step 1)**	Considerations to help non-profit groups prioritize what existing or new volunteer opportunities should be offered virtually	Pg. 22, 23
2 **Virtual volunteering opportunity design considerations**	**Position descriptions (step 2)**	Key considerations for organizations to test the design of their virtual volunteering opportunities	Pg. 24
3 **Communications framework**	**Promoting and recruiting (step 3)**	Evaluate which communications channels to use to share your virtual volunteering opportunities to youth	Pg. 25, 26
4 **Activities list and calendar**	**Orientation, training, and supervision (step 5 & 6)**	List of activities and an illustrative calendar to maintain engagement with youth volunteers	Pg. 27-31
5 **Feedback survey best practices**	**Close and get feedback (step 7b)**	Sample feedback survey for youth virtual volunteering opportunities and best practices to consider when developing feedback surveys	Pg. 32, 33
+1 **Technology platform enablers**	**N/A**	List of possible technology platforms to use at each step of the youth volunteer management cycle to support your virtual volunteering program	Pg. 34

C **Tool 1:** Virtual volunteer opportunity prioritization matrix

Expected outcomes

▪ **Prioritize which volunteer opportunities to transition to virtual** (existing and/or new opportunities)

How to use tool

▪ **List out all your current and potential youth volunteer opportunities**

▪ **Evaluate each opportunity against the two axes of the matrix:** (1) alignment to our youth volunteers' interests, and (2) easiness of digitizing volunteer opportunity

▪ **Classify each volunteer opportunity** (high, medium and low priority)

▪ In the short-term, **focus on transitioning opportunities in the "high priority" quadrant** to virtual

   – In the medium-long term, focus on transitioning opportunities in other quadrants

   – May not want to transition low priority opportunities

Alignment to our youth volunteers' interests

How excited would youth volunteers be to participate in the opportunity?

Would it be a meaningful and engaging opportunity for our youth volunteers?

	Low	**High**
High	**Medium priority opportunity** *Really meaningful for youth, but harder to digitize*	**High priority opportunity** *Really meaningful for youth and easy to digitize*
Low	**Low priority opportunity** *Some meaningfulness for youth and hard to digitize*	**Medium priority opportunity** *Some meaningfulness for youth, but easy to digitize*

Easiness of digitizing volunteer opportunity

How much time and effort will be required to offer this volunteer opportunity virtually?

C Tool 1: Defining axes for virtual volunteer opportunity prioritization matrix

Alignment to our youth volunteers' interests

- **What interests do our youth volunteers have today?**
  – What volunteer opportunities have youth been **most excited about in the past**? What were some characteristics of those opportunities?

- What are some **general interests that young volunteers have today**? These can include:
  – Skills development (e.g., web development, critical thinking)
  – Meeting new people & building relationships
  – Exploring potential career paths
  – Contributing to causes they're passionate about
  – Building a sense of independence

- **Are there new volunteer opportunities that can be developed** based on the needs of your non-profit group and the interests of youth volunteers?

Easiness of digitizing volunteer opportunity

- What **existing capabilities/resources could we use** to transition the volunteering opportunity to virtual?

- What **capability/resource gaps still exist**?

- Based on our existing capabilities/resources and gaps, which volunteering opportunities on our list are **easy vs. medium vs. hard to digitize**?

- How **familiar are we with youth volunteers**? Does the team have a strong understanding of the expectations from youth volunteers?

- What **existing human resources can be leveraged** to manage youth volunteers? What human resources gap exists?

C Tool 2: Virtual volunteering opportunity design considerations

Expected outcomes

- **Transitioning an existing youth volunteering opportunity online**
- **Create a new** youth virtual volunteering opportunity

How to use tool

- **Write a draft description** of your virtual volunteering opportunity
- **Test your description** against the key considerations

Key considerations

Does your volunteer opportunity have clear outcomes?

Did you set clear expectation for your volunteers?

Did you identify the required resources?

Rationale

- **Volunteer hours are important to youth** – ensure that how and when hours will be given is clarified
- Being clear on expected outcomes will help volunteers **understand how their contributions are making an impact**
  – Communicate these expected outcomes to your volunteers early on (e.g., onboarding)

- Being clear on the characteristics of your ideal volunteer will help **ensure you involve the right youth in your opportunity**
  – This is particularly helpful for virtual volunteer opportunities, which tend to be more technical and require hard skills (e.g., social media)

- Having a complete understanding of the resource requirements needed **will lead to a better program**, and could even **help identify areas for improvement**
  – This is particularly important as the **resource requirements for virtual opportunities will likely be different from in-person opportunities**

C Tool 3: Opportunity sharing framework

Size and youth engagement level of social media following →

Ideal outcomes

- Encourage non-profit groups to explore more **youth-oriented marketing strategies**
- Provide non-profit groups with an **understanding of how they can reach and recruit more youth volunteers**

How to use the tool

- **Evaluate the size of your current social media following** (i.e., small vs. medium vs. large)
- Based on current social media size, **choose which partnership and/or word-of-mouth social media activities** you can do in addition to your current marketing efforts

	Partnership strategy	**Word-of-mouth strategy**
Description	▪ Share virtual volunteer opportunities through **external channels** (e.g., youth organizations, schools)	▪ Share virtual volunteer opportunities through **internal channels** (e.g., own Facebook page)
Social media following	▪ **Small** (< 500 followers) ▪ **< 25% of followers** youth[1]	▪ **Large** (> 1,500 followers) ▪ **> 50% of followers** are youth[1]
Activity examples	▪ **Partner with youth councils** to share your opportunity and to direct youth to your social media /website ▪ **Connect with local guidance counselors** to share the opportunity and direct youth to your social media pages/website	▪ Encourage youth volunteers to invite their friends/families through **sharing your content** ▪ **Encourage your youth to post online for you** (e.g., sharing their experiences, sample posts)

You can use activities from both strategies, but the strategy corresponding to the organization's social media should be "primary"

1. Definition of demographics for "youth volunteer group" should be established by organization prior to recruiting volunteers; definition may vary by organization

25

C Tool 3: Sample social media post

Pledges for Change
Published by Amanda Wu [?] · April 20 · ⊕

During this unprecedented time, we at Pledges for Change are looking for ways to support non-profit organizations that rely on in-person volunteers to run their day-to-day activities. As a result, we are currently gauging interest in virtual volunteering! Virtual volunteering is a great way to complete your volunteering hours and contribute to your community from the safety of your home. If you're a high school student, and this interests you, please let us know by filling out the form below:

https://forms.gle/NJGpCUHv3rg3WhPs5

#NVW2020

Interested in Virtual Volunteering?

PLEDGES FOR CHANGE

Your caption should include a more detailed description, a call to action and hashtags (if any): captions are a great way to provide more information and to engage youth (e.g. through a link, liking the post). Use a hashtag to make your posts easier to find if a youth wants to look it up again later.

Include simple messaging that will pique youth's interest: you can do this by asking a question, those who are interested are likely to read more.

Include a bright and aesthetic graphic: youth consume thousands of graphics everyday, visually appealing graphics are more likely to grab their attention

Social media best practices

- **Choose platforms that fit best with your demographic** – e.g., Facebook usage is mostly equal across all age groups, but youth are more likely to be active on Instagram

- **Post regularly** - your posting schedule will depend on your capacity, but it's important to set up a regular cadence

- **Different platforms will require different posting frequencies** - ex. posting on Twitter three to four times a day is appropriate vs. once a week on Instagram

- **Create hashtags** - hashtags allow you to easily search through your mentions and content. Platforms also use hashtags to identify your content and show it to relevant audiences.

- **Interact with others** - social media is meant to be just that, social. Interact your followers, but also other non-profit groups, this will increase visibility

- **Use the full capabilities of your platform** - find out what tools you can use on your platform, whether that's Instagram Stories or Facebook Live events

- **Read your analytics and adjust your strategy** - all platforms provide some level of insights. Use these to identify which posts perform better than others and why

C Tool 4: Activities list and calendar

Expected outcomes

- **Improve engagement of youth volunteers by establishing a regular cadence of activities** that involve skill development, relationship-building, and sharing feedback
- Non-profit groups should be able to **more effectively use technology** to support youth engagement

How to use tool

- Use templates provided to **plan the activities you'd like to conduct throughout the volunteer opportunity**

☐ Details follow

Events and suggested frequency	Purpose	What to do
Onboarding (one-time)	**To prepare volunteers for the role** (e.g., expectations, resources available, timelines)	• Identify what resources and knowledge volunteers will need to have in order to be best prepared for their role
Training (bi-weekly[1])	To provide volunteers with **skill development opportunities** that could be helpful during and beyond their role.	• Determine what skills youth volunteers are interested in developing; evaluate against skills that would be relevant to the volunteer opportunity • Develop training materials to guide sessions and serve as follow-up materials that volunteers can take away
Check-ins (bi-weekly)	To share **updates, discuss changes,** and **understand how volunteers are doing**	• Set up individual bi-weekly, 30 min. meetings with all volunteers involved • Share updates, collect updates from volunteers, and get an understanding of how volunteers are feeling
Socials (monthly[2])	To **celebrate volunteer contributions** and **build relationships**	• Set up monthly, 1 hr. virtual events with all volunteers involved – Determine whether there is a budget available, which can determine what types of activities could be done
Resource access / ongoing comms. (ongoing)	To **facilitate consistent engagement** with volunteers and **provide resources necessary**	• Create a shared folder online to upload any resources that may be relevant for volunteers (e.g., Google Drive, Dropbox) • Determine a regular frequency for communications with volunteers (e.g., daily, weekly) and identify communication method (e.g., email, Slack)

1 Depending on the length of the volunteer opportunity and available content 2 There should be at least one social event for volunteers during their involvement in the volunteer opportunity (if the volunteer opportunity is shorter than 1 month)

C Tool 4: Planning a virtual training session

1. Identify training opportunities

What resources and knowledge should volunteers have in order to…

1) **Be best prepared for the activities associated** with their role?

2) **Have a meaningful experience** during and following the completion of the volunteer opportunity?

2. Evaluate training capability

Based on the identified training opportunities, what trainings could we provide, based on:

1) **Existing resources** (i.e., what resources are available… are there any constraints?)

2) **Existing internal knowledge** (i.e., what do we already know, which we could train volunteers on?)

3. Plan virtual training session

Preparation:
1. If live training sessions are needed, **consider all volunteer's time zones and plan accordingly**
2. **Always test your materials before sending them out** (e.g., links)

Presentation:
1. **Use PowerPoint to present your content** - this allows you to incorporate both text and visuals into your training
2. **You can record your voice directly onto the slides** and save the file as a video for easy uploading onto platforms such as YouTube.
3. **Pre-record all training material** to ensure that volunteers who get onboarded at different times have access to the same information.

Post-Training:
1. **Schedule a post-training follow-up call with your volunteers** to clarify any last questions they may have.

C Tool 4: Check-in template

30 min. bi-weekly check-in

Date:

September XX, 20XX

Participants attending:

- Volunteer 1
- Volunteer 2
- Volunteer XX
- Volunteer Manager

Meeting agenda:

1. **Quick check-in** (i.e., how is everyone doing, on a scale of 1-10)? – *2 mins.*

2. **Updates from volunteer manager** (i.e., important news to share with volunteers)? – *3 mins.*

3. **Updates from volunteers** (i.e., important news for volunteers to share with the group about what they are working on)? – *10 mins.*

4. **Discussion** (i.e., any news shared by volunteers that needs to be addressed by the group)? – *5-10 mins.*

5. **Plan between now and next check-in** (i.e., next steps) – *5 mins.*

*Ensure there are accessible channels for volunteers to connect individually with volunteer managers outside of standard bi-weekly checkpoints (for sensitive concerns, for behavior etc.)

Meeting notes:

Major updates shared:

Next steps shared:

Action items from meeting:

C **Tool 4:** Possible virtual socials for youth volunteers

Possible virtual socials (and suggested size)		Description	Additional resources (if applicable)
Activities not requiring budget	**Board Game Night** (~10 volunteers)	**Board games are a great option to build team camaraderie.** There are multiple options for games throughout the Internet such as Pictionary, Codenames, and Telestrations, all for free.	• **Pictionary:** https://skribbl.io/ • **Codenames:** http://codewordsgame.com/
	Trivia (Unlimited)	**Create your own virtual trivia night** - all you'll need is an enthusiastic host and a list of questions! **Helpful Hint:** have a theme to centre your questions around.	• **Kahoot:** https://kahoot.it/
	Guest Speakers (Unlimited)	**Invite a guest speaker from your non-profit group to meet the volunteers in a conversation-friendly format.** The speaker could be a staff member or past volunteer. **This is a great opportunity for volunteers to candidly ask questions and learn more about the organization and the impact they are making.**	
Activities requiring budget	**Lunch/Dinner** (~5-10 volunteers)	**Treat your volunteers to a lunch/dinner to thank them for their contributions.** This is also a great opportunity for volunteers to get together to share about their experiences and connect with one another!	• **Food delivery services:** e.g., Uber Eats, Skip The Dishes, DoorDash
	Fitness Class (Budget-dependent)	**Offering a online fitness class can be a great way to energize your volunteers.** Fitness classes welcome people of all skill levels and is a great way for a team to collectively participate in one activity. Not to mention it's healthy!	• **Reach out to your local gym or fitness studio** to see if they offer online classes.
	Paint Night (Budget-dependent)	A great way to add variety to your socials. **Paint Nights are great for painters of all skill levels.** Many vendors offer easy-to-follow interactive tutorials over video.	• **Yaymaker:** https://www.yaymaker.com/virtual/experience/101/

C Tool 4: Illustrative monthly calendar

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Week 1	**Onboarding (one-time)**				
			Resource access / ongoing comms. (ad hoc)		
Week 2			**Check-in (bi-weekly)**		**Training (bi-weekly)**
	Resource access / ongoing comms. (ad hoc)				
Week 3					**Social event (monthly)**
	Resource access / ongoing comms. (ad hoc)				
Week 4			**Check-in (bi-weekly)**		**Training (bi-weekly)**
	Resource access / ongoing comms. (ad hoc)				

C Tool 5: Collecting feedback from virtual volunteers

Expected outcomes

- **Collection of valuable input from youth volunteers** on what worked well and what could be further improved
- Lays the foundation for a **feedback cycle that non-profit groups can use to continue improving their virtual volunteering opportunities**

How to use tool

- **Ask volunteers to fill out survey after the volunteer opportunity**
- Record answers and **reflect on strengths / areas for improvement**
- **Determine plan for integrating feedback**

Question type (by step in volunteer mgmt. lifecycle)	Why these questions matter	Question examples
Planning roles and position descriptions	- Gives an opportunity to see **how the whole volunteering experience could be better** - Chance to **call out things that worked** well/impactful	- How did you find your overall volunteer experience? - What were some things that worked well? - What were some ways you think we could improve for next time?
Promoting and recruiting	- Provides insight into **which methods are most effective in attracting volunteers** - **Effective advertising to youth constantly changes**, asking questions around it will provide insight into current youth trends	- How did you find out about this opportunity? - Is there a better way to reach youth in the future that we don't know of?
Orientation, training, and supervision	- Helps understand how volunteers feel about the process of the opportunity - **Identifies better ways to communicate** - **A stronger day-to-day relationship leads to more youth who will volunteer long-term**	- How engaged did you feel through the experience? Did you feel like you were part of the experience? - How was the communication level between you and the organization?
Close and get feedback	- Helps identify the **overall positives and negatives with this specific experience** - Allows you to **gauge whether or not this opportunity was effective for the youth**	- What practical skills do you feel like you developed in your volunteer role? - Do you feel like you've made an impact in your community as a result of this role?

For more sample questions to use in your feedback survey, see pg. 38 in Appendix

C Tool 5: Example – virtual volunteering feedback form

Planning roles and position descriptions

1. **How did you find your overall volunteer experience?**

   1 (not meaningful)   3 (neutral)   5 (really meaningful)

2. **Did you feel like you made an impact?**

   1 (not at all)   3 (neutral)   5 (absolutely)
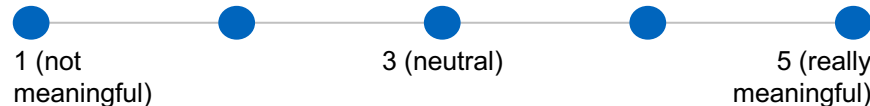
3. **What were some things that worked well? Where do you think we could improve for next time?** *(Free text field)*

Promoting and recruiting

4. **How did you find out about this opportunity?**
   - Social media
   - Word of mouth
   - Forums/external sites (e.g., Volunteer Toronto)
   - Other (please specify)

Orientation, training, and supervision

5. **How engaged did you feel through the experience? Did you feel like you were a part of the organization?**

   1 (not at all)   3 (neutral)   5 (absolutely)

6. **How was the communication level between you and the organization?**

   1 (too little)   3 (just right)   5 (too much)

Tips for developing your own feedback survey

- **Phrase your questions so that they are neutral** (as opposed questions that will influence their decision)

- **Have balanced options for answers, so that respondents can give a more accurate answer** (ex. extremely helpful, very helpful, helpful VS. very helpful, helpful, neutral, not helpful, very not helpful)

- **Ask questions one at a time to avoid confusing respondents**

- **Keep your surveys simple so that more of your volunteers are willing to fill it out** – 6-8 questions is typically the right length for a feedback survey

C Free technology platforms to use to support and enhance a youth virtual volunteering program

Step in volunteer management cycle	Technology platform	How you could leverage the technology platform	Tips and best practices (not exhaustive)
Promoting and recruiting *Step 3*	**Facebook**	Share a detailed post and link to your website	▪ Make sure you **have active accounts on all major social media platforms** (i.e., Facebook, Twitter, Instagram) to ensure that you're reaching out to all interested youth
	Twitter	Post frequent updates; share information from news sources relevant to your cause	▪ **Regularly post about the opportunities you're offering**
	Instagram	Make a single post introducing new opportunities, direct followers to your website	▪ **Create a social media plan** to provide high-level guidance on messaging (e.g., types of opportunities to share on social media, when to share about opportunities)
	LinkedIn	Share a detailed post to a more job-oriented youth audience	▪ **Do your research**; tailor your social media plan to each social media platform's strengths
Orientation & training and supervision *Step 5 & 6*	**Slack**	A versatile communication tool - can be used to message youth volunteers	▪ Setting up these platforms early to **keep your volunteers updated and allow them to engage in Q&A**
	Zoom / Google Meet	Video conferencing software that can be used for virtual face-to-face communications	▪ **Try to only use video conferencing for more formal meetings to prevent "Zoom fatigue"** – you can use phone calls and emails for more informal meetings
	Google Drive	Can be used as a collaborative working space, and to upload resources (youth should have familiarity)	
Close and get feedback *Step 7b*	**Google Forms**	Very simple and easy-to-make surveys. Surveys can be sent out on a regular basis	▪ **Regularly send out surveys to all your volunteers**, and make sure they can answer anonymously; this will ensure that the feedback is always relevant
	MailChimp	Useful for mass communications (email changes, newsletters, etc.)	▪ **Always create an open-text field "suggestion box"** where volunteers can provide any additional input
	Survey Monkey	Can be used to create more complex surveys, but requires a subscription for surveys above 10 questions	

Program overview:	▪ **Recruited two digital receptionists** in 2019 **(high school students in grades 11 and 12)**
	▪ **Recruiting process took one month** and included emailing, calls, interview, selection and training
	▪ Youth volunteers alternated weeks to **check Instagram direct messages at least once a day and document the types of messages**
	  – Spent a minimum of 15 minutes/day responding to messages, but time can increase to a couple hours if volunteers decided to post stories
	  – Volunteers were provided with a standard messaging document to use in their replies
	  – Monthly check-ins with the Volunteer Manager

Virtual volunteering challenges:

▪ **Need to invest in on-going training**
  – Youth needed more coaching to feel comfortable representing an organization

▪ **Communicating frequent updates**
  – There was a delay in communicating updates to the standard messaging document, causing the volunteers to respond with outdated information
  – Volunteer managers must be mindful of communicating changes to volunteers

▪ **Need to identify opportunities to connect youth the with broader team**
  – Youth volunteers want exposure to strategy development and learning opportunities

Virtual volunteering benefits:

▪ **Youth volunteers are eager and willing to learn**

▪ **Great digital intuition**
  – No technology questions from volunteers despite minimal training
  – Youth are comfortable with smartphones, therefore it is easy for them to complete social media tasks (ex. one youth does their volunteering on their way to school)

▪ **Very reliable**
  – Accountable by filling out Google Doc on a daily basis

Lessons learned:

▪ *"If you're a volunteer manager, you might just be thinking about service delivery, but if you're innovating new volunteer roles, talk to other departments. Talk to communications and see how you can supplement the work they're already doing."*

▪ *"Don't be afraid of new technologies to enable [virtual volunteering] or setting boundaries around new technology"*

For more information about this case study, contact:

Cara Eaton, Director of Strategic Communications
Volunteer Toronto
ceaton@volunteertoronto.ca

C Virtual volunteering case study: Drama School (Young People's Theatre)

Program overview:	▪ **Recruited high school-aged volunteers for their Summer and Fall Drama School program**
	▪ Drama School **had a lot of interested youth volunteers** – some were past students who have built strong relationships with YPT
	▪ Each drama class had one volunteer that was **responsible for supporting the teacher** in:
	  – Leading activities and drama games
	  – Working with a small group of students in breakout sessions

Virtual volunteering challenges:

- **Technical glitches**
  - Early WiFi issues were solved by staff who were available to solve technical problems and answer questions during class
- **Unsure how well existing activities would translate online**
  - YPT practiced the activities with volunteers beforehand on Zoom to ensure they were well-prepared for class
  - They have since received great feedback from both students and parents

Virtual volunteering benefits:

- **Able to reach out to volunteers across the city**
  - YPT has four in-person locations across Toronto for drama classes,
  - In the past, some volunteers and students lived too far to attend specific drama classes
  - Now, volunteers and students can attend any of YPT's classes
- **Able to hone creativity**
  - Virtual classes offer volunteers an added opportunity to be creative with their activities

Lessons learned:

- *Especially with youth volunteers and virtual volunteering,* **"let yourself try it, let yourself fail a little and/or succeed a little – it's ok and just keep learning from it."**

- **"It's not always going to be easy** *and some programs may need a lot of modification to make them work, and some will be more straightforward."*

- **"Be honest with your youth –** *they can handle way more than we think and can understand mature and complex topics better than we think."*

For more information about volunteering, contact:
Ryan Singh, Community Volunteer Coordinator
Young People's Theatre
rsingh@youngpeoplestheatre.org

For more information on Drama School, contact:
dsassistant@youngpeoplestheatre.org.

Appendix

Sample survey questions grouped by Volunteer Toronto's Volunteer Management Lifecycle 2.0

Opportunity design
- How did you find your overall volunteer experience?
- Did you feel like you made an impact?
- What were some things that worked well? Where do you think we could improve for next time?

Advertise opportunity
- How did you find out about this opportunity?
  - Social media
  - Word of Mouth
  - Forums/External sites
  - Other (please specify)
- Is there a better way to advertise this opportunity in the future?

Manage opportunities day-to-day
- How engaged did you feel through the experience? Did you feel like you were part of the experience?
- How was the communication level between you and the organization?
- How often would you like to communicate with your volunteer manager?
- What is the best way to communicate with you?
  - Email
  - Specific Social Media Site
  - Text
  - Other

Collecting feedback
- What practical skills do you feel you're developing in your volunteer role?
  - Ex. time management, accountability, speaking skills, etc.
- Do you feel these skills have already or will support your career?
- Do you feel like you made an impact in your community as a result of this volunteer role?
- Do you feel more connected to other diverse people as a result of this volunteer role?
- Do you feel like your volunteer role has helped you develop new perspectives?
- What has been the most valuable about your volunteer role:
  - Developing practical skills
  - Having an impact in the community
  - Connecting with my community
  - Learning new perspectives
  - Building confidence
- What practical skills do you want to improve in your volunteer role?