

# COMMUNITY ACTION: MK

## Digital Volunteering - what is it?

Usually we tend to think of volunteering in terms of a role or a responsibility that a volunteer would travel to carry out on an ongoing basis. With the rise of digital technology, volunteering opportunities have become more diverse, less time and space based and more flexible for both volunteer and host. Even the concept of volunteering is expanding - from asking for help with online campaigns to supporting people to be digital champions to help those not yet able to benefit from the more connected world.

### What are the benefits?

[Youthnet](#) describe some of the benefits of digital volunteering;

*"The biggest benefits are that our volunteers can fit volunteering commitments around busy lives and contribute even if they live in a remote community. They do their shifts from home, maybe after work, uni or college. This gives them the flexibility to volunteer when it suits them and contributes to making our programmes accessible for people with disabilities."*

### Case Studies

Here's a good example of a charity (The Woodland Trust) looking at what it needs - data compliance - and figuring out a way to involve volunteers in achieving it. The driver for this is the added value the volunteers can bring to this kind of task.

#### Data Compliance Mystery Shopper

As part of an internal project we have been giving staff advice and guidance on how to ensure that any communication they send out makes it clear to the recipient what they are signing up for. Following this advice we would like to check how many of our webpages are data compliant.

This is a very important exercise for us so that we can ensure we are offering a safe environment for supporters to engage with us and that they trust us to be responsible with their data. As part of this brand new role you will be acting as a mystery shopper, testing out these pages and reporting your findings. Home based, Voluntary.

Here at Community Action: MK, we looked at how we could involve volunteers in the MK:Smart citizen innovation programme by creating accessible, task based opportunities that could be carried out according to the volunteer's own availability and delivered online. An added benefit has been promotion of the programme to those volunteers and increased engagement for our work.

## MK:Smart - Engaging New Volunteers

To engage new volunteers we created digital tasks that would help support the MK:Smart project. We advertised a short paragraph about the volunteering opportunity and how it could benefit those interested. The information was easy to read and left readers wanting to know more. We shared these opportunities with potential volunteers through the [do-it.org](http://do-it.org) website and within a couple of weeks we had people who were interested in digital tasks such as proofreading and film making/photography which proved to be very popular.

Those who expressed an interest in the film making/photography were able to help us by volunteering remotely, for example one volunteer came up with a photography competition process which has proven very helpful in our planning. Volunteers have also been able to contribute to the project in their own time and with flexibility, by going out to take photos of the city for use on our marketing materials for the project. These volunteers have also gained experience in photography, been able to build their portfolio and have had an opportunity to show their work publicly.

Our proofreading volunteer has become a very useful tool. By reading through our newsletters once a month we have avoided errors and improved readability. This opportunity has also been flexible for the volunteer as he can adjust this to his own time commitments.

Vijay, proofreading volunteer said *"I'm definitely enjoying proofreading these newsletters and getting to learn about MK:Smart activities."*

We're also exploring how, through our [Employee Volunteering programme](#), we can create opportunities to tap into the digital skills of local businesses and connect them with the charities and community groups we work with. Here's an example of a recent digital volunteering opportunity we created:

### Use your everyday expertise to help transform local charities

Imagine using your expert knowledge and the everyday business practices that you take for granted in your daily work and turning them into a priceless **Business Planning** factsheet to help local charities and community groups carry out their vital work making Milton Keynes a better place to live for everyone.

Community Action: MK produce a wide range of free digital information sheets for charities and community groups and we would like to add a **Business Planning** one to the list. This could be written by an individual or team and focus on basic steps and checklists to get people with little or no business planning experience started. It needs to be no longer than 4 sides of A4 and can contain hyperlinks. For an example see our website here: <http://communityactionmk.org/for-charities/info/>

We will promote your involvement by featuring your name and company logo on the information sheet and our website.

If you'd like help to chat through how digital volunteering could help your charity or community group please email [volunteering@communityactionmk.org](mailto:volunteering@communityactionmk.org) or call 01908 661623.

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