

# IYV

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# Virtual Volunteering in Canada

## What is virtual volunteering?

Virtual volunteering is volunteering “at a distance.” Virtual volunteers carry out their duties in whole or in part over the Internet. Virtual volunteering has the potential to involve new groups of volunteers who, for a variety of reasons, cannot get to the locations where voluntary organizations do their work.

## How much virtual volunteering is taking place in Canada?

The short answer is “not much.” Of 494 managers of volunteer resources surveyed,<sup>1</sup> only one-third reported having *any* openings for virtual volunteers. Of those who had virtual volunteering openings, 72% of the national group and 85% of the regional group said that they had made between one and five placements in the previous year; 15% and 12% respectively said they had made no placements.

Only 4% of the 1,747 volunteers who had used the Volunteer Opportunity Exchange (VOE) said that they had done any virtual volunteering in the past year. Only 16% of the 196 “traditional” volunteers said they had done virtual volunteering.

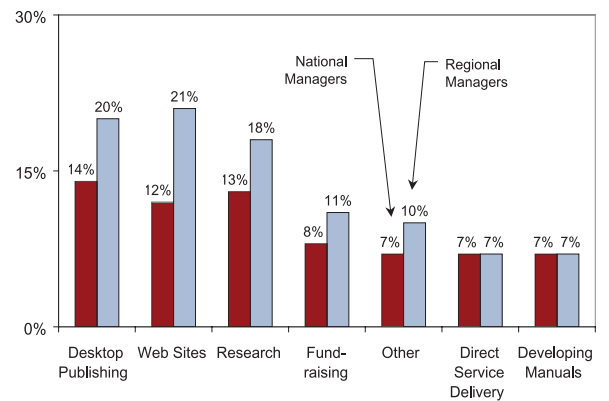
## What are virtual volunteers doing?

The top three types of virtual volunteer assignments reported by managers of volunteer resources were desktop publishing (national 14% and regional 20%), Web site development and maintenance (national 12% and regional 21%) and research (national 13% and regional 18%).

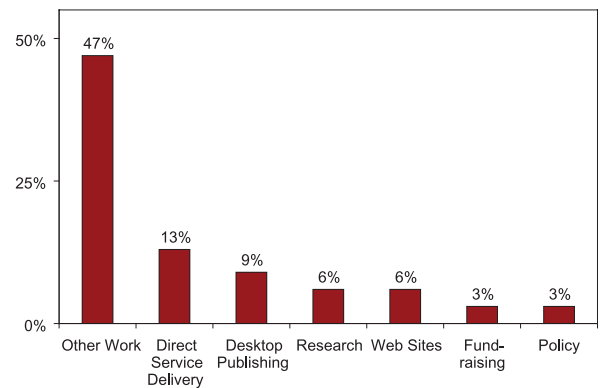
Among virtual volunteers who used the VOE (47%) reported that they carried out some “other” type of virtual volunteer assignment, including: database entry and management; volunteer management including recruitment; scheduling, and coordination; project management including event and community mapping projects; technology support; language translation; accounting; and “virtual public relations” including writing, lobbying and consulting. Thirteen percent reported doing direct service delivery, while 9% reported doing desktop publishing.

Among traditional volunteers, 39% reported doing desktop publishing, 39% reported doing office work and 39% reported doing communications tasks. About one-quarter reported working on Web sites (29%), doing fundraising (26%) and performing leadership (26%) tasks.

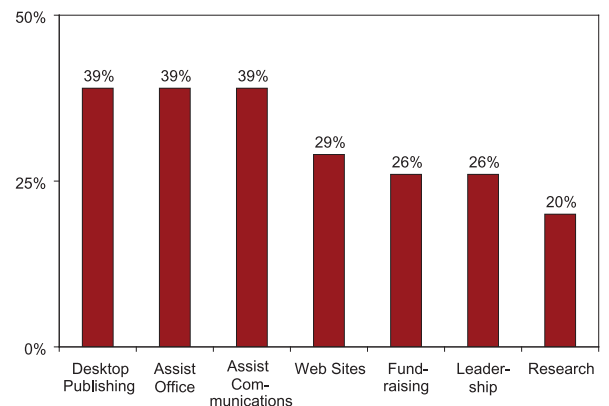
## Virtual Volunteering Reported by Managers of Volunteer Resources



## Virtual Volunteering Reported by VOE Users



## Virtual Volunteering Reported by Traditional Volunteers



**Who are virtual volunteers and where do they come from?**

Many of the differences in the characteristics of virtual volunteers and on-site volunteers are not statistically significant. For example, in both groups a high percentage of virtual volunteers were female (71% of traditional volunteers and 79% of VOE volunteers), but the same was true of their on-site counterparts (74% and 92% respectively). There were no differences based on age or education level.

However, virtual volunteers in the traditional group tended to volunteer more hours than on-site volunteers, while those in the VOE group tended to volunteer fewer hours. As well, virtual volunteers in the VOE group generally had less volunteer experience than the on-site volunteers.

**How satisfied are managers of volunteer resources with virtual volunteers?**

Seventy-nine percent of managers of volunteer resources reported no difference in the dependability of virtual volunteers compared to on-site volunteers. Eighty-two percent reported no difference in the quality of work of the two groups.

**What is the future for virtual volunteering?**

Virtual volunteering is not yet prevalent in Canada, but it has considerable potential. As the use of information and communications technology grows, so does the number of tasks that require gathering and disseminating information, and communicating with stakeholders via e-mail and Web sites. Volunteers using computers and the Internet can do much of this work away from the organization's premises. Many other administrative, direct service and fundraising tasks may also be adaptable to virtual volunteering positions.

<sup>1</sup> In the fall and early winter of 2001-2002, as part of a research project for the International Year of Volunteers, we surveyed 494 managers of volunteer resources across Canada — 129 in Victoria (the "regional" group) and 365 members of Volunteer Canada (the "national" group). We also surveyed 1,747 potential volunteers who had used the online Volunteer Opportunities Exchange (VOE), located at [www.voe-reb.org](http://www.voe-reb.org), and 196 "traditional" volunteers contacted through member organizations of Volunteer Victoria. A full report, *Virtual Volunteering: Current Status and Future Prospects* is available online at [www.nonprofitscan.ca](http://www.nonprofitscan.ca).

**Characteristics of On-site and Virtual Volunteers**

	Traditional Volunteer Group				VOE Group			
	Virtual Volunteers		On-Site Volunteers		Virtual Volunteers		On-Site Volunteers	
	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n
<b>Age</b>								
Under 25	4%	1	8%	12	60%	40	50%	13
Over 25	96%	27	92%	136	40%	27	50%	13
<b>Gender</b>								
Male	29%	8	26%	38	21%	14	8%	2
Female	71%	20	74%	110	79%	53	92%	24
<b>Employment</b>								
Employed	82%	14	86%	64	62%	34	62%	15
Unemployed	18%	3	14%	10	38%	21	38%	9
<b>Education</b>								
No university	30%	8	39%	58	45%	29	35%	9
University	70%	19	61%	90	55%	35	65%	17
<b>Volunteer Hours</b>								
Less than 5	50%*	14	78%*	115	51%*	34	19%*	5
More than 5	50%*	14	22%*	33	49%*	33	81%*	21
<b>Volunteer Experience</b>								
Previous experience	16%	28	84%	148	49%*	33	81%*	21
No previous experience					51%*	34	19%*	5

*Note: Because of the small numbers of virtual volunteers, it was necessary to collapse each variable into two categories.*  
*\*Significant beyond the 99% (p<.01) confidence level*

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