

Using the Web to Effectively Attract Volunteers to Non-profit Organizations

Adrian Goh, B.S.

Ph.D. Student, University of North Carolina at Charlotte, Organizational Science
9201 University City Blvd., Charlotte, NC 28223-0001
Tel.: 704-999-0965 * FAX: 704-687-3096 * E-mail: agoh@uncc.edu

Joseph Allen, M.A.

Ph.D. Student, University of North Carolina at Charlotte, Organizational Science
9201 University City Blvd., Charlotte, NC 28223-0001
Tel.: 980-253-1315 * FAX: 704-687-3096 * E-mail: jalle114@uncc.edu

Steven Rogelberg, Ph.D.

Professor, University of North Carolina at Charlotte, Organizational Science
9201 University City Blvd., Charlotte, NC 28223-0001
Tel.: 704-687-4742 * FAX: 704-687-3096 * E-mail: srogelb@uncc.edu

Anna Currie, M.B.A.

Ed.D. Student, North Carolina State University, Adult and Community College Education
Business Education Teacher/Volunteer Resource Manager
Charlotte Mecklenburg Schools, Northwest School of the Arts
1415 Beatties Ford Rd., Charlotte, NC 28216
Tel.: 704-904-1287 * FAX: 980-343-5593* E-mail: anna.currie@cms.k12.nc.us

Abstract

Non-profit organizations often rely on volunteers to help staff and sustain organizational services, functions, and programs. The web is a critical vehicle for attracting these needed volunteers. The authors searched the available literature and reviewed close to 100 non-profit organizational websites to identify best practices of note. Fourteen best practices in web site design are forwarded and discussed.

Key Words:

web presence, best practices, volunteer resource management, recruitment,
non-profit organizations

Introduction

An effective and robust web presence is seen as essential to for-profit organizational success (Waters, 2007). The need for a highly effective web site is not exclusive, however, to profit organizations; it is critical for non-profit organizations as well. The web site can be an effective medium for public relations, employee recruitment, informing the community of

events or news, fundraising, and of primary interest in this paper, recruiting volunteers (Cober, Brown, Levy, Cober, & Keeping, 2003).

Volunteers are a vital resource for many non-profit organizations (Safrit, Schmiesing, Gliem, & Gliem, 2005). Volunteer programs' web sites provide volunteer resource managers (VRMs) a method with which they can reach their

intended audience (potential volunteers) with few reservations about prohibitive costs or physical distance. By not connecting in an effective way with potential volunteers via the web, non-profit organizations run the risk of not attracting and signing-up the essential volunteer talent they need. Our goal was to uncover the best practices for constructing or designing volunteer program web sites for the purposes of attracting and recruiting volunteers. To determine best practices in volunteer program web site design, the authors conducted literature

searches on the topic, scanned close to 100 non-profit websites, and spoke with VRMs. From this search and examination, 14 key web practices of note were identified (Table 1).

Suggested Volunteer Program Web Site Best Practices

Best Practice 1: The front page of the organization's web site provides a link to the volunteer program web page

Table 1
Recommended Best Practices for Volunteer Program Web Sites

Best Practice
1. The front page of organization's web site includes a link to volunteer program web page
2. The organization's web site includes the organization's mission statement
3. The volunteer program's web page provides the volunteer program mission statement Web site provides a description of the volunteer program
4. The volunteer program's web site provides a clear, detailed description of the volunteer program
5. The web site lists requirements for volunteering
6. The web site indicates minimum number of hours required of volunteers
7. The web site lists available volunteer positions
8. The web site provides a job description for each volunteer positions
9. The web site provides specific steps to volunteer (the process is outlined)
10. The web site indicates if volunteer orientation is available and provides information on the next orientation session
11. The web site allows visitors to apply online or download the application form
12. The web site allows visitors to register for more information
13. The web site provides contact information for the volunteer resource manager
14. The web site indicates the type of training volunteers will receive beyond orientation

Volunteer programs that are building a web site must first ensure that visitors can access it. A direct link from the organizational web site's front page to the volunteer program web page should be provided. This link should be in a prominent location so the potential volunteer is not searching. Accessibility is the first critical step to attracting volunteers.

Best Practice 2: The organization's web site provides an organizational mission statement

Best Practice 3: The volunteer program's web site provides the volunteer program's mission statement

Once visitors reach the volunteer section of the organization's web site, a mission statement for both the organization and the volunteer program should be presented. Mission statements signify the culture of an organization and communicate to the reader the purpose of the volunteer program (Vandijck, Desmidt, & Buelens, 2007). Most organizations develop a mission or vision statement early in the organization's existence. Non-profit organizations who recognize the vital importance of fostering a healthy volunteer program may consider developing a separate but related volunteer program mission statement. The volunteer program mission statement should support the overall organization's mission statement and provide an understanding of the kind of culture that the organization wants their volunteers to experience.

Best Practice 4: The volunteer program's web site provides a clear, detailed description of the volunteer program

To further attract volunteers to the organization, a descriptive statement with detailed and comprehensive information about the volunteer program should be

provided. This description may provide additional information about the program not apparent from the mission statement (e.g., potential positions for volunteers, targeted outcomes of volunteering, etc.). A detailed description gives the impression of a capable and focused volunteer program and reflects very well on the VRM.

Best Practice 5: The web site provides requirements for volunteering

Best Practice 6: The web site indicates minimum number of hours required of volunteers

Best Practice 7: The web site lists available volunteer positions

Best Practice 8: The web site provides a "job description" for each volunteer position

The website must be informative. The web site should give potential volunteers an understanding of their potential role through clear, detailed explanations of the different volunteer positions available. These descriptions should explain the requirements for volunteering as well as the minimum number of hours necessary to carry-out the position tasks. Additional information in this form acts as a realistic preview of the actual day-to-day duties of volunteering, presents the scope of work the visitor may be engaged in, and ensures that applicants have a good idea whether or not they will enjoy fulfilling their responsibilities.

Best Practice 9: The web site provides specific steps to volunteer (the process is outlined)

Best Practice 10: The web site indicates if orientation is available and provides information on the next orientation session

Best Practice 11: The web site allows visitors to apply online or download the application form

If a visitor to the web site decides that volunteering at the organization is right for them, they should be given a chance to act on this decision. According to McFarland (2005), volunteer programs can benefit from providing detailed, user-friendly guidelines for the application process. There are several ways to facilitate the application process. These include providing a short step-by-step instruction guide, providing specific information on volunteer orientation sessions, and enabling both web-based and mail-based applications.

Best Practice 12: The web site allows visitors to register for more information

Best Practice 13: The web site provides contact information for the VRM

The web site should have avenues for potential volunteers to obtain additional information and contact the VRM for specialized information/questions. By allowing potential volunteers to register for more information, VRMs can reduce the possibility of information overload and be strategic in the placement of information on the website. In addition, providing contact information for the VRM serves to involve the potential volunteer in the application process by giving them an avenue for getting answers to their specific questions. Fielding each potential volunteer's question allows the VRM more direct control over the recruitment process and incorporates a level of screening in the recruitment process that is otherwise not available.

Best Practice 14: The web site indicates the type of training volunteers will receive beyond orientation.

In addition to seeking the information necessary to make an informed

decision, visitors may also be looking to see what development opportunities (e.g. continuing education programs on organization specific topics such as software and administrative training, bedside manner, or animal care and handling) are available. The training of volunteers, beyond what is provided during orientation, is suggested to help volunteers perform their functions independently and competently (McFarland, 2005). The availability of training may help sway visitors who have decided to volunteer, but are considering positions at different organizations. Visitors to the web site may look to such additional training as a potential benefit of volunteering at a particular organization.

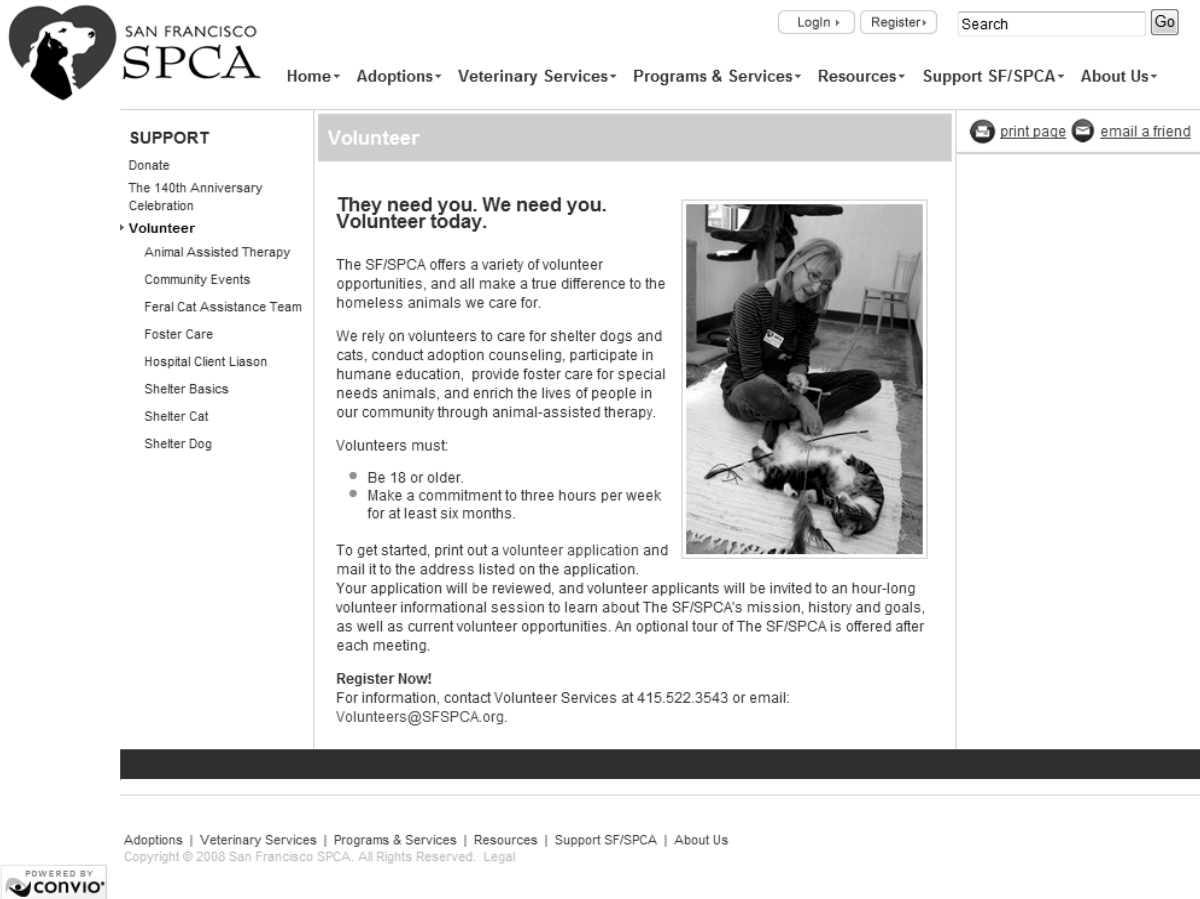
Implications for Volunteer Resource Managers

As VRMs begin to harness the potential of their volunteer program web sites as recruitment tools, we advocate adoption of the best practices listed. While many benefits can be gained through the use of these practices, they should be carefully implemented, with care taken to adjust each practice to each particular volunteer program. An example of an organization and volunteer program that have several of these practices adapted for their use is shown in the San Francisco SPA's web site (Figures 1 and 2). First looking to Figure 1, note that there are two separate ways to access the volunteer program web site; one link ("Volunteer") in the box entitled "Make a Difference," and another (not pictured here) using the drop-down menu accessible by clicking the "Support" button. Following either of these links brings you to the volunteer program's front page (see Figure 2).

Figure 1. A sample of a volunteer-based animal welfare organization web site (i.e., the organization's front page).

The screenshot shows the front page of the San Francisco SPCA website. At the top left is the SPCA logo, a heart containing a dog's head, with the text "SAN FRANCISCO SPCA". To the right are navigation links: "Adoptions", "Veterinary Services", "Programs & Services", "Resources", "Support SF/SPCA", and "About Us". Further right are "Login" and "Register" buttons, a search bar with a "Go" button, and a "Search" label. The main content area is divided into several sections. On the left, a large image shows the exterior of the "Our New Leanne B. Roberts Animal Care Center" at night. To its right, a dark banner features a dog's face and the quote "Every dog must have his day." by Jonathan Swift, with buttons for "View Featured Dogs" and "View All Dogs". Below this is a "Featured dogs" section with a dropdown arrow. To the right of the featured dogs is another dark banner with a black cat's face and the quote "Dogs come when they're called; cats take a message and get back to you." by Mary Bly, with buttons for "View Featured Cats" and "View All Cats". Below this is a "Featured cats" section with a dropdown arrow. At the bottom left, a "Make a Difference" section states that the SPCA found homes for over 4,000 cats and dogs last year and provides links to "Donate NOW!" and "Volunteer". At the bottom right, an "Upcoming Events" section lists two events: "March 4, 2009; 7 p.m. - 10 p.m. - 140th Anniversary Dinner Celebration" and "January 17 - February 28, 2009 - Diapers & Dogs Dog Training Class". The footer contains navigation links, copyright information for 2008, and a "POWERED BY CONVIO" logo.

Figure 2. Sample volunteer program front page.



Note that the volunteer program front page incorporates several important pieces of information, including the volunteer program mission statement; requirements to volunteer; minimum number of hours required to volunteer; a description of the volunteer program; and contact information for visitors to attain additional information. This information allows the volunteer to assess their personal fit with the volunteer program's aims, determine if they are capable of fulfilling the minimum requirements, and ask for additional information if desired.

We include a second example web site, that of the American Cancer Society (Figures 3, 4, and 5), to illustrate another way in which the practices put forth in this

article may be utilized. Again, note the multiple links to the volunteer program web site from the organization's web site front page. Looking to the volunteer program web site (Figures 4 and 5), we see that the volunteer program vision statement is given prominent placement, emphasizing its importance. There is also a link to apply to volunteer available, as well as links to additional information on the various volunteer opportunities available. The information provided in each of those links is similar the information provided in the first example. The key difference between the two examples is that the layout of the web site itself was customized to incorporate the best practices differently.

Figure 3. A sample of a volunteer-based health organization web site (i.e., the organization's front page).

The screenshot shows the American Cancer Society website front page. At the top left is the ACS logo. Navigation links include 'In My Community', 'Get Involved', 'Donate Now', 'Contact Us', and 'Site Index'. A search bar with a 'Go' button is present, along with links for 'Información en español' and 'Asian and Pacific Islander Materials'. A banner for 'Happy Birthday' is a victory song, with a 'Replay' button and a 'Learn More' button. Below the banner are three main sections: 'I need information for...' listing various user groups; 'Learn About Cancer' with a 'Choose a cancer topic' button; 'Join the Fight Against Cancer' with a list of actions (Donate, Participate in events, Volunteer your time, Advocate for change); and 'Find ACS in Your Community' with a ZIP code search field. A 'Donate Now' button is also visible. The 'In the Spotlight' section features an article about a healthier take on cake, and the 'Managing Your Cancer Experience' section offers help with treatment decisions.

American Cancer Society®

In My Community | Get Involved | Donate Now | Contact Us | Site Index

Search **Go ▶**

Información en español | Asian and Pacific Islander Materials

Need answers? 1-800-ACS-2345 Sign In | Register

“Happy Birthday” is a victory song. Replay

Join the movement for more birthdays.

Learn More ▶

I need information for . . .

- Patients, Family, & Friends
- Survivors
- Caregivers
- Health Information Seekers
- Professionals
- Donors and Volunteers

Learn About Cancer

▶ Choose a cancer topic

Join the Fight Against Cancer

- ▶ Donate
- ▶ Participate in events
- ▶ Volunteer your time
- ▶ Advocate for change

Find ACS in Your Community

Enter ZIP: **Go ▶**

Search using city and state >>

Donate Now

Find It Fast

- ▶ Access to Health Care
- ▶ Cancer Facts & Figures
- ▶ Statistics
- ▶ Research Programs and Funding
- ▶ Guide to Quitting Smoking
- ▶ Clinical Trials

In the Spotlight

A Healthier Take on Cake
As part of an effort to create a world with more birthdays, ACS teamed up with the Culinary Institute of America (CIA) to create a healthier take on the birthday cake. [read more >>](#)

▶ What You Need to Know About Prostate Cancer

Managing Your Cancer Experience

Get help making treatment decisions, understanding the effects of treatment, finding treatment centers and doctors, coping with side effects, and talking with others.

Select a topic . . . **Go ▶**

Figure 4. Sample volunteer program front page.

American Cancer Society®

[My Planner](#)

Employment & Volunteer Opportunities

[Careers](#)

[Volunteers](#)

It is the policy of the American Cancer Society not to discriminate against any employee or any applicant for employment because of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, sexual orientation, age, disability, marital status or veteran status. This policy shall include, but not be limited to, the following: recruitment and employment, promotion, demotion, transfer, compensation, training, layoff and termination.

Volunteers

Save Lives. Fulfill Yours.

Search jobs now

Our Vision

We, the volunteers and staff members of the American Cancer Society, empower and mobilize communities to prevent cancer, save lives, and diminish suffering by distinguishing the Society as the organization of choice for meaningful volunteer engagement.


Sign up now to volunteer

Save lives. Fulfill yours.™

Being a member of the American Cancer Society team is a unique opportunity to put your special talents to work for the good of the world.

What's it really like to volunteer with the American Cancer Society? Today, there are over three million different answers to that question, because each of our valued volunteer partners has a unique story to tell. Your volunteer role could be as valuable and rewarding as theirs. To learn more about the experience of volunteering for the Society, check out Andrew Salner's story and others like his, and hear how giving a little time is rewarding within itself.

Figure 5. Sample volunteer program front page (cont'd).

<p>discriminate against any employee or any applicant for employment because of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, sexual orientation, age, disability, marital status or veteran status. This policy shall include, but not be limited to, the following: recruitment and employment, promotion, demotion, transfer, compensation, training, layoff and termination.</p>	<p>American Cancer Society, empower and mobilize communities to prevent cancer, save lives, and diminish suffering by distinguishing the Society as the organization of choice for meaningful volunteer engagement.</p>  <p>What's it really like to volunteer with the American Cancer Society? Today, there are over three million different answers to that question, because each of our valued volunteer partners has a unique story to tell. Your volunteer role could be as valuable and rewarding as theirs. To learn more about the experience of volunteering for the Society, check out Andrew Salner's story and others like his, and hear how giving a little time is rewarding within itself.</p> <p>Why volunteer?</p> <p>Volunteering for the American Cancer Society means you have an opportunity to save lives and fulfill your own. When you volunteer, you can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Make a meaningful difference in your community.■ Help cancer patients and their families.■ Have flexible options and opportunities that fit your schedule.■ Build relationships and networks that last a lifetime.■ Learn and grow personally and professionally.■ Involve your family and friends. <p>Interested in volunteering?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes I'm ready to volunteer. Let me tell you about myself and my preferences.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Maybe I need to know more about the kinds of opportunities you have.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Not sure Tell me more about why I should volunteer for the Society.</p>	<p>volunteer</p> <p>Save lives. Fulfill yours.™</p> <p>Being a member of the American Cancer Society team is a unique opportunity to put your special talents to work for the good of others, in an innovative and people-centered professional environment.</p> <p>Laura Reeves Chief Talent Officer Watch a video message from Laura Reeves</p>
---	---	---

Although these examples provide illustrations of several of the best practices outlined, there are many ways of accomplishing these best practices through web site development. If possible, Information Technology (IT) professionals who focus on web design can provide VRMs with numerous options that can be tailored to their specific program's needs. Articles such as those referenced for the best practices section can be used in consultation with the IT professional to ensure that the volunteer program web site is designed

effectively for each specific volunteer program.

VRMs should also consider looking to research and trade articles both within and outside the nonprofit sector for the latest information on new web practices to consider and which of those practices may be most effective at bolstering outcomes important to volunteer programs, such as volunteer retention, donations and volunteer satisfaction. Although we found very few of these studies, over time new knowledge will accumulate.

References

- American Cancer Society (2009). *The American Cancer Society web site*. Retrieved July 30, 2009, from <http://www.cancer.org>
- Cober, R., Brown, D., Levy, P., Cober, A., & Keeping, L. (2003). Organizational web sites: Web site content and style as determinants of organizational attraction. *International Journal of Selection and Assessment, 11*(2), 158-169.
- McFarland, B. (2005). *Volunteer management for animal care organizations*. Washington, D.C.: Human Society Press.
- Safrit, R.D., Schmiesing, R.J., Gliem, J.A., & Gliem, R.R. (2005). Competencies for contemporary volunteer administration: An empirical model bridging theory with professional best practice. *The Journal of Volunteer Administration, 23*(3), 5-15.
- San Francisco SPCA (2009). *Volunteer: The San Francisco SPCA web site*. Retrieved May 25, 2009, from <http://www.sfspca.org/support/volunteering/>
- Waters, R. (2007). Nonprofit organizations' use of the internet: A content analysis of communication trends on the internet sites of the Philanthropy 400. *Nonprofit Management & Leadership, 18*(1), 59-76.
- Vandijck, D., Desmidt, S., & Buelens, M. (2007). Relevance of mission statements in Flemish not-for-profit healthcare organizations. *Journal of Nursing Management, 15*(2), 131-141.
-

About the Authors

Adrian Goh is a Ph.D. student of Organizational Science at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. His research interests include volunteering, cross-cultural issues, social processes, diversity and cognitive ability testing. He has worked on research addressing issues of status, volunteer program assessment, work-family conflict, multinational corporations in China, and moderated multiple regression.

Joseph A. Allen is a doctoral candidate in Organizational Science at the University of North Carolina Charlotte. He currently serves as a part-time instructor of Business Communication at the University of North Carolina Charlotte. He is an active researcher examining meetings at work, emotion management in organizations, customer service orientation, social effectiveness, volunteer/employee relations in non-profit organizations, dirty work, job satisfaction, and employee health and well-being.

Dr. Steven G. Rogelberg is a Professor and Director of Organizational Science at the University of North Carolina Charlotte. In addition, he was the founder and serves as Director of the Organizational Science Consulting and Research Unit. He has over 50 publications and nearly 50 invited addresses/colloquiums addressing issues such as team effectiveness, health and employee well-being, meetings at work, organizational research methods, and organizational development. He is the current Editor of the *Journal of Business and Psychology*.

Anna Currie is an incoming Ed.D. candidate in Adult and Community College Education at North Carolina State University and currently a Business Education Teacher in the public school setting. She is also the school's VRM and a "professional volunteer" herself. Her research interests include social responsibility via the Internet and the relationship between youth and media.