



# Micro-volunteering

**Micro-volunteering is volunteering in bite-sized chunks. The benefits are essentially no different from those of traditional volunteering – kind-hearted people giving up their own time to help individuals and groups that need assistance in one way or another. It is, however, much more convenient for volunteers to participate in, and, as a result, much easier for groups to attract volunteers.**

This briefing will look at how voluntary arts and crafts groups can benefit from micro-volunteering, not only as a means of getting tasks done, but also as an exciting way to connect with new participants.

### What is micro-volunteering?

Consider the act of helping an elderly person cross the street – that's micro-volunteering, because you spent a few minutes of your own time helping somebody out.

The term 'micro-volunteering' describes a task done by a volunteer, or a team of volunteers, in small increments of time, either online via a computer or smartphones, or in person. It typically does not require an application process or training period, takes less than 30 minutes to complete, and does not require an ongoing commitment by the volunteer.

The first recognised example of online micro-volunteering – was 'Project Gutenberg' (begun in 1971 on the ARPANET – the computer network that would later become the internet), which recruited online volunteers to convert printed books into electronic versions.

Common features of micro-volunteering:

- It is relatively simple to perform, so almost anyone can do it.
- It requires no, or a very low level of, commitment.
- It can be completed in under 30 minutes or multiple sessions thereof.
- It can be done any time.
- It is often non-location based, so that anybody anywhere in the world can participate in it.
- It is free to participate in.
- It requires no (or minimal) specialist training or knowledge on the volunteer's part.



### What are the benefits?

#### Benefits of micro-volunteering to the individual

- Because micro-volunteering can often be conducted anywhere and anytime, an individual whose personal or physical circumstances restrict them geographically can still perform actions in a safe environment, wherever they wish.
- The potential diversity of micro-volunteering opportunities makes it all-inclusive, so there are no barriers with regard to age, race, sex, culture or creed.
- Because micro-volunteering is typically non-committal, you can do as much or as little as you want, fitting the actions around your lifestyle rather than the other way round. It can even be conducted while watching TV, riding on the bus or tucked up in bed in your pyjamas!
- Because micro-volunteering requires minimal training and induction, you can perform your volunteer tasks instantly and without restriction.

As well as the intrinsic benefits outlined above, incentives can also help motivate potential volunteers. This can be anything from free entry to your event, promotional goodies, or even the promise of a mention on your website can be enough motivation for some.

#### Benefits of micro-volunteering to voluntary arts groups

The benefits of micro-volunteering are not always apparent, as it may seem self-defeating to allow people to volunteer in shorter bursts, as less can be achieved in such timescales.

However, traditional volunteering doesn't appeal to everybody, especially these days when time is at a premium. Any volunteering opportunity that can be fitted into a person's busy schedule can only be a good thing.

With a carefully thought-out offering, you can attract people that would never otherwise consider volunteering with you, and in doing so through micro-volunteering, may find that they wish to become involved on a more intensive basis in the future.

## How can you make the most of micro-volunteering?

### Get an idea

There are a huge number of micro-volunteering projects around at the moment – you only have to look at the databases on Help From Home or Sparked to see hundreds of one-off opportunities (see the Further Resources section below).

Here are some examples of micro-volunteering projects that your voluntary arts or crafts group could replicate:

- Giving out flyers at an event – this is like traditional volunteering, but if there are a number of people who are willing to hand out those fliers and each has only a small amount of time to spare, the work can be evenly spread out amongst the volunteers, accomplishing the same result.
- Transcribing documents online – volunteers can convert your group's printed archives to digital format for posterity and to help reach a new, online audience.
- Recording audio books – volunteers can record samples of your group's output, such as poetry, stories or plays and send you the audio files to publish on your website.
- Producing a map of voluntary arts activity in your area – volunteers can help populate an online map of voluntary arts opportunities in your area, around a particular art or craft form, or across art forms.
- Spreading messages using social media – asking friends, fans and followers on platforms such as Facebook and Twitter to help spread messages for you is easy to do and can be very effective. For example, you're looking to organise a fundraising day for your group and you want to spread the word without paying for marketing and PR services. Send a message to all the friends on your group's Facebook page asking them to send out the same message to all their friends. Before you know it – hours, even minutes later – thousands of people can be made aware of your event. If even ten per cent of those people participate in your day, that's potentially a lot of much-needed funds.

### Case study – People's Collection Wales

People's Collection Wales is a website full of photographs, sound recordings, documents, videos and stories about the history and heritage of Wales and its people. It is drawn together from the main heritage institutions in Wales, alongside content from smaller museums, archives and libraries. From a micro-volunteer's point of view, it is also a place where you can share your story of Wales.

The site allows you to contribute your own content to make sure that your bit of knowledge of Welsh history is told. It could take the form of a memory, a photograph, story, letter, diary, drawing, postcard, recording (film or sound), poem or souvenir. See the [People's Collection Wales website](#) for more.

To entice people to micro-volunteer for you, you'll need to get into their minds to see what motivates them to participate in this particular form of volunteering. Look back at the benefits to the individual listed in section B and make sure your idea ticks those boxes.



### Put it into practice

Having formulated your idea, the next stage will be to win over your fellow committee members or group leaders. You'll need to introduce your idea of a micro-volunteering project, as well as getting them to buy-in to the concept of micro-volunteering in general.

Prepare a simple written plan that includes a mission statement, goals and objectives for your micro-volunteering idea. Identify the potential costs and, following the discussions you've already had with other colleagues, allay any fears that may have arisen. Establish a timeline but be flexible enough for unforeseen problems. Identify activities and assign responsible parties to complete them.

Your plan should also include some or all of the following details:

- Who will coordinate the project?
- What resources will you need to set it up and keep it running?
- How long should it run for?
- How can the standard of the voluntary work be checked?
- What will be the project's 'code of conduct', and what happens if this is broken?
- How do you protect personal information?
- How can you entice volunteers repeat their services or be retained?
- Will it be a good return on your investment?

As the range of micro-volunteering projects is so varied, this Briefing cannot hope to cover the particular project you're intending to set up, so at this point it may be advisable to turn to some of the initiatives featured on Help From Home (see the Further Resources section) and either base your project on theirs or contact them for advice.





However, you might like to consider the following points:

- Arrange to allocate funds to consultants or advisers you plan to employ to develop the project (if applicable).
- You may need to amend your policies and procedures relating to volunteers. This may not be that easy as micro-volunteering challenges some of the most deep-rooted aspects of coordinating volunteers with regards to, say, criminal records checks, insurance and health and safety issues. Ensure safety measures are included, especially where children or vulnerable adults are involved. If necessary, get help from a legal advisor.
- Ensure that instructions are simple enough not to create a barrier that stops people from volunteering, but that provide a clear framework. Whilst people love the freedom to be able to 'get on with it', there still needs to be a set of rules that directs the volunteer towards the end result.
- Test drive the project with colleagues or interested supporters.
- Be prepared to change and evolve your idea in the development and post-development stage.
- Ask others who have done it. There's no substitute for the experience gained by other initiatives in their efforts to set up their own micro-volunteer projects.

#### Timebanking – another form of micro-volunteering

Timebanking is a way of exchanging your time for a charitable purpose. For every hour you 'deposit' in a timebank, by giving practical help and support to others, you are able to 'withdraw' equivalent support when you or your voluntary arts group is in need, in the form of an hour's worth of someone else's time.

In each case you decide what you can offer. Everyone's time is equal, so one hour of your time is equal to one hour of somebody else's time, irrespective of whatever you choose to exchange. Because timebanks are just systems of exchange, they can be used in an almost endless variety of settings.

For more information on timebanking and what your group could gain from it, visit the [Timebanking UK website](http://www.timebankinguk.org).

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#### Further Resources

Thanks to Help From Home for allowing us to reproduce content from 'How to set up a micro-volunteering project – a guide to charities and non-profits' available to download from [Help From Home](http://www.helpfromhome.org).



- **Help From Home** – a volunteer-driven, unincorporated association that runs a free community service to promote and encourage participation micro-volunteering opportunities.
- **Timebanking UK** – Timebanking UK is the national umbrella organisation for timebanking. Its training programmes cover a broad range of interests from local community champions interested in timebanking to commissioners of public services.
- **Sparked** – a US-based micro-volunteering site based on open invitation challenges posted by not-for-profit organisations.

#### Voluntary Arts Briefings

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