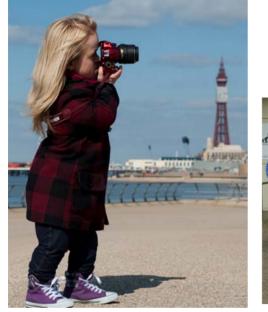


A practical guide to exploring and developing the potential of micro-volunteering for your organisation









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1. About this guide

This guide is based on research completed by the National Council of Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) and the Institute for Volunteering Research (IVR).¹ It aims to bring together the good practice from this research including learning from organisations delivering micro-volunteering in practice. This included in-depth interviews and case studies as well as participatory workshop to draw out and reflect on good practice.

The research demonstrated that micro-volunteering isn't right for every organisation and isn't a magic solution. The landscape of micro-volunteering and how it is being applied is also diverse so this guide will probably not answer all of your questions. This guidance recommends that you go through a process that fully explores the strategic, as well as, the practical implications of micro-volunteering in order to make the right decision for your project, group or organisation. For those who decide to take it forward this guide provides some practical advice.

2. What is micro volunteering?

The term micro-volunteering is contested and is used by organisations in many different ways, however the research identified 8 defining features.

- 1. Duration it involves small increments of time
- 2. Access it is easy to get started and do
- 3. Immediacy it is quick to start and complete, and requires minimal planning
- 4. Convenience you decide when and where
- 5. Level of formality no formal agreement between the organisation and the volunteer is needed
- 6. Frequency it can be a one-off or repeated
- 7. Activity it involves discrete actions
- 8. Location it can be online or offline

¹ IVR & NCVO, November 2013, The value of giving a little time: Understanding the potential of micro-volunteering, <u>http://www.ivr.org.uk/images/stories/micro_volunteering_full_report_071113.pdf</u>

These defining features informed the formulation of the following definition:

*Micro-volunteering is bite-size volunteering with no commitment to repeat and with minimum formality, involving short and specific actions that are quick to start and complete.*²



The purpose of this definition is to serve as a starting point for organisations and groups to think through what micro-volunteering means for them and how it might fit into their existing volunteering offer.

Table 1 provides some examples of the kinds of activities that fit with this definition. This is not an exclusive list and it demonstrates the wide range of activities encompassed by this definition, some of which you may not have considered to be a form of volunteering before so it may be useful to think of it simply as a way of giving a little time.

² IVR & NCVO, November 2013, The value of giving a little time: Understanding the potential of micro-volunteering, <u>http://www.ivr.org.uk/images/stories/micro_volunteering_full_report_071113.pdf</u>

	Table 1 What is micro-volunteering?							
	Campaigning and communication	Fundraising	Research and data	Practical help				
Completed offline	 Signing a petition Taking part in a flashmob Giving a talk to raise awareness Preparing a video Sending cards Manning a stall at a fair 	 Taking part in a street collection Running at a sponsored race Taking up a charity branded credit card Placing a collection box in a local shop 	 Completing a questionnaire Providing a case study 	 Sorting out recycling Helping with stage make-up Taking part in a tree planting event Painting a pop-up shop Baking a cake for a community event Collecting goods from people's homes Knitting a hat for a premature baby 				
Completed online	 Signing a petition Liking a Facebook page Providing feedback on marketing materials Writing a blog post Taking part in a webinar or online discussion Retweeting a message 	 Crowdfunding Online sponsorship Signing up to Everyclick³ search engine Shopping online via TheGivingMachine⁴ 	 Completing a questionnaire Reporting an issue (e.g. graffiti) Counting birds in your garden Providing a case study Contributing content to Wikipedia Crowdsourcing recommendations Donating photos 	 Donating computer capacity Setting up a Facebook event Graphic design of a logo or webpage 				

³ Everyclick, <u>http://www.everyclick.com/</u> ⁴ The Giving Machine, <u>http://www.thegivingmachine.co.uk/</u>

3. Is micro-volunteering right for your organisation?

There are a range of ways in which organisations can engage with micro-volunteering but it does not suit everyone or every organisation. It is important that organisations think carefully about whether micro-volunteering fits with their strategic direction. In this part of the guide we recommend some key steps that will help you make this decision. Working through these steps will help you to explore the potential of enabling people to give a little time to your organisation.

Step 1 Establish whether there is a strategic fit with your organisation

It is important to consider whether micro-volunteering fits with the strategic direction of your organisation and its relationship to your mission and vision. This will help you decide whether you want to invest some time and effort to take it forward. Work through these questions:

- Will it contribute to achieving your strategic aims?
- Will it support the future direction of your volunteering strategy?
- Will micro-volunteering add value to volunteering in your organisation?
- What are the limitations in relation to the strategic contribution it can make?

Table 2 will help to explore what the potential might be for you.

Table 2 Exploring the potential					
Does your organisation	Is micro-volunteering appropriate for your organisation?				
want to involve volunteers across a wide geographic area?	Yes – micro-volunteering has the potential to involve volunteers in any area, even internationally				
have opportunities that can be delivered in shorter periods of time?	Yes – this is a defining feature of micro-volunteering				
need volunteers in face-to-face roles that take place at a set regular time?	No – some micro-volunteering opportunities happen face-to-face but they tend to be delivered remotely and are often one-off				

have opportunities that can be broken down in to smaller tasks?	Yes – the cumulative impact of lots of smaller tasks can be significant
need to have volunteers working directly and on their own with vulnerable people and children?	No – although existing volunteers who have been vetted could micro-volunteer
want to increase the range of opportunities for volunteers?	Yes – micro-volunteering can increase the volunteering offer for organisations and give people more choice when getting involved
not have the time or money to invest in this?	No – micro-volunteering is given freely but like other forms of volunteering needs support and coordination from paid staff or other volunteers

Step 2 Identify potential micro-volunteering tasks

The research identified a wide range of tasks that would fit with the definition of micro-volunteering. The examples in **Table 1** should help you to think about what micro-volunteering tasks you might want to offer. You should also think about how and where opportunities would take place and which area of your work or the organisation they might be part of.

You may find that you identify more tasks than you are able to offer or manage in practice. The next part of this step is to prioritise and decide which ones to take forward.

Consider the following questions in relation to each opportunity to help decide which have the most potential.

- Where is the greatest need?
- Is it feasible to provide and manage that opportunity?
- What actions will have the greatest impact for your beneficiaries, the organisation and the volunteers themselves?
- Is this something people want to do? / Is there demand for this type of action or task?
- What are the opportunities and challenges that each opportunity presents?
- Ensure you are clear on why you are involving volunteers- why does it add value or how does it improve things?
- What might the risks be? And could you manage or mitigate these?

At this stage it is important to think carefully about the role of technology. In some cases technology can help to maximise the potential of micro-volunteering but it is not always an essential ingredient.⁵ Mobile technology provides an opportunity for some to better integrate volunteering into their busy lives, allowing them to contribute whilst on the go. However, as with any volunteering role, if it is only online then you may be excluding some people with relevant skills who cannot or do not want to engage online. You shouldn't rule out opportunities to support others to overcome these barriers. For example, technologically savvy micro-volunteers could support organisations or other volunteers who are not as familiar or confident.

Consider how and where the activity or action will take place including whether it will be online and offline as shown in the examples in **table 3**, bearing in mind that technology may also provide opportunities for people to participate remotely.

Table 3 Micro-volunteering in practice							
Micro-volunteering action or activity	Where is it promoted?	Where does it take place?	How is it completed?				
Baking a cake for a community event	Offline (word of mouth)	Offsite (at home; no face- to-face interaction)	Offline				
Painting a pop-up shop	Online (via Facebook event)	Onsite (with face-to-face interaction)	Offline				
Writing a blog post	Online (via an organisation's website)	Offsite (at home; no face- to-face interaction)	Online				
Reporting an issue	Online (via an online platform)	Offsite (on the move; no face-to-face interaction)	Online				

⁵ IVR & NCVO, November 2013, The value of giving a little time :Understanding the potential of micro-volunteering, p.22 <u>http://www.ivr.org.uk/images/stories/micro_volunteering_full_report_071113.pdf</u> It might be helpful to think in more detail about a micro-volunteering task or action from start to finish, see micro-volunteering action- Example A on the next page. This might help to identify any challenges or barriers you might face in putting it into practice and what processes you might need in place to make it happen.

Micro-volunteering action- Example A

What is the micro-volunteering action?

Giving feedback on a new page of the website for the information and advice service.

What will people be asked to do?

Visit the page of the website and email their feedback.

Where and how will they do it?

Online using email

What will the benefit be?

It will help us to make our new information and advice page more user-friendly. It will save us money as we thought we would have to get advice from a consultant. Our existing volunteers and service users have said they are interested in helping out a little more. They would like to help improve the website because they feel it would make it easier for people that need our service to get in touch.

Where will the action be advertised?

Online using the website, Facebook page and Twitter.

How will micro-volunteers be supported to do this?

The information on the task will give some key bullet points or questions to provide some guidance and ensure that the feedback is useful and relevant e.g. how user friendly is the webpage? How easy was it to find out how to get in touch with us? What suggestions would you make to improve it?

Who else will be involved?

Web manager, volunteer manager, information and advice team and admin support volunteers.

Will you build a relationship with those involved and if so, how?

We will ask new volunteers if they would like to be added to a mailing list so we can keep in touch with them. There will be an automated email that says thank you for helping out. There will also be a thank you message on Facebook and Twitter.

What is the risk?

People may not be happy if their changes aren't included. We might not get any feedback that is useful to us.

How will you mitigate the risk?

We will provide guidance on what kind of feedback we need. A disclaimer is also included that says we won't be able to incorporate everyone's suggestions and ideas.

How will you measure impact?

We will look at number of hits on the page of the website before we made the changes based on the feedback and after. As well as this we can count the number of contacts we get for our information and advice service before and after. This is data we collect anyway. The number of people who gave feedback could be recorded too so we know how many completed the microvolunteering action. In future we plan to ask clients how they found out about us so we could find out how many came via the website but we are going to see how it works first.

Step 3 Understand the connection with other types of volunteering

You may already offer a range of volunteering opportunities or other ways to engage with your organisation that require different levels of commitment. Clarifying the relationship between micro-volunteering and other forms of volunteering can help you to think more strategically about how micro-volunteering might enhance your volunteering offer.⁶

Mapping your opportunities as shown below may help you to think this through. You could do this according to the level of contribution or engagement or depending on the kind of volunteering you already offer you could categorise roles in terms of the level of training or induction required or the level of ongoing support a role may need.



Micro-volunteering could be the starting point for getting involved in other volunteering roles in the organisation so you should think about how this might work in practice.⁷ However, as with any volunteer, in order to support them effectively you need to think about the following points.

- What are peoples' motivations for volunteering? And what might they hope to gain from it?
- People's lifestyles, circumstances and individual motivations impact on how much and the way in which they want to volunteer and this might change over time.

⁶ IVR & NCVO, November 2013, The value of giving a little time: Understanding the potential of micro-volunteering, p.20 <u>http://www.ivr.org.uk/images/stories/micro_volunteering_full_report_071113.pdf</u>

⁷ IVR & NCVO, November 2013, The value of giving a little time :Understanding the potential of micro-volunteering, p.36 <u>http://www.ivr.org.uk/images/stories/micro_volunteering_full_report_071113.pdf</u>

- Micro-volunteering is not always a first step towards more long-term opportunities. Long-term
 retention may not always be the end goal or a possibility for volunteers or organisations, in fact it
 may provide opportunities with those with more substantial volunteer roles to reduce the amount of
 time they give as a volunteer but still be involved and maintain the connection with your
 organisation.⁸
- Think about how you might keep people informed and updated of what opportunities you have available. Keep in touch where appropriate, but be cautious because not everyone will want this. It's a tricky balance to strike but putting some time into understanding people's motivations for volunteering will help you to achieve this.

Step 4 Develop understanding in the organisation

At this stage you need to think about who needs to know about micro-volunteering in order to help make it happen. This might include people who have not been involved in volunteering before. Micro-volunteering can help to raise the profile of volunteering in your organisation and can provide an opportunity to engage and involve teams that don't usually work with volunteers.

One way to explore this may be to set some time aside to focus on micro-volunteering. As part of our research we ran participatory workshops with organisations and the key steps and questions identified in this guide might help you to frame this kind of discussion.

Working in this way can help to:

- share learning and ideas as well as to promote cross-team working.
- ensure buy-in from others early on in the decision making process.
- work out how responsibility for different aspects of the management and support of microvolunteering might be shared.
- provide an opportunity to involve your existing volunteers. They might have some helpful ideas or suggestions and will ensure they feel involved which is key if this represents a change in the way you usually work. This will help to reassure your volunteers that you recognise and value different kinds of involvement and are taking measures to ensure this is reflected in practice. You should ensure that there isn't greater value placed on one type of volunteering compared to another.

⁸ Brodie, E. et al, 2011: Pathways through Participation: what creates and sustains active citizenship, <u>http://www.pathwaysthroughparticipation.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2011/09/Pathways-Through-Participation-final-report Final 20110913.pdf</u>

Step 5 Decide what you will call it

You may not want to call it 'micro-volunteering'. Our research found a low awareness of the term 'microvolunteering' among volunteers and non-volunteers, even those who were actually engaged in micro-volunteering opportunities.⁹ For this reason you may not want to advertise your micro-volunteering opportunities as 'microvolunteering', you may wish to call them something else e.g. 'micro-actions' or 'micro-tasks' or a term you think will engage your target audience for that task.

The language you choose to use internally may differ from how you advertise opportunities. Calling it 'microvolunteering' in your organisation may just help to differentiate it from other kinds of volunteering which may be managed and delivered in another way. Using the term can be a way to demonstrate that you recognise the value of giving a little time. Whichever name you choose you need to be clear on what people can expect from this kind of opportunity so it is not miss sold and volunteers aren't disappointed.

Could you help with a quick fix?

Do you have knowledge about the local area? If so, we need you to help answer questions that can support others in your community.

Simply join our Facebook group and participate by posting answers to questions posted on our wall. It's that simple!

This project is aimed at encouraging information sharing between members of our community to help develop links and support access to activities and services.

⁹ IVR & NCVO, November 2013, The value of giving a little time :Understanding the potential of micro-volunteering, p.17 <u>http://www.ivr.org.uk/images/stories/micro_volunteering_full_report_071113.pdf</u>

Micro-volunteering action- Example B

What is the micro-volunteering action? Giving a talk about healthy eating

What will people be asked to do? Deliver a talk to raise awareness about healthy eating in their local community.

Where and how will they do it?

In the community e.g. community centre.

What will the benefit be?

It will help to raise awareness about healthy eating in the community and raise our profile locally. Volunteers will be more informed about healthy eating, get experience of public speaking, develop their communication skills and meet new people.

Where will the action be advertised?

On our website but also in local venues like the community centre, job centre and local businesses. We have decided not to call it micro-volunteering as we don't think the term will mean anything to most people. We want a broad mix of people and so want to make it sound accessible. We are just calling it 'Let's talk health'.

How will micro-volunteers be supported to do this?

We will send out packs which include the talk content and some hand-outs which tell people where to go to for more information.

Who will be involved in the organisation?

We are all volunteers so we will all help out. We have one person writing the content for the packs and a group of us who will help with the publicity materials and with sending the packs out.

How will you thank those involved?

By emailing those who agreed to be contacted and we will also post a message on our Facebook page and on Twitter.

How will you build a relationship with those involved?

We will ask them to email us to let us know when they have delivered the talk and to how many people. If they enjoyed it we might ask them whether they would like more handouts so they can deliver another session as we hope that some people might want to do it more regularly. However, we are only asking for a commitment to do one talk.

What is the risk?

The aim for this isn't to give people advice on their diet and we are a bit concerned that some volunteers might take it upon themselves to do that when they don't actually have enough knowledge to do it.

Continues...

How will you mitigate the risk?

We are providing the content for the course. The guidance we provide asks people not to give advice and a list of organisations they can signpost people to should they need more information.

How will you measure impact?

We will be monitoring the number of talk packs we send out and asking volunteers to let us know how many people they gave their talk to. They may not always get back to us and so we might have to chase people up which might become time consuming but we have decided to do this because we need to measure the impact of our campaign and we have some volunteers willing to help out with this.

4. Micro-volunteering in practice: challenges and solutions

Organisations involved in the research identified 3 key challenges in taking micro-volunteering forward in their organisation. These were:

- Challenge 1: Creating meaningful micro-volunteering opportunities
- Challenge 2: Managing micro-volunteering
- Challenge 3: Building relationships with micro-volunteers

You may notice that not all the challenges that were identified are unique to micro-volunteering. If you have been involved in supporting or managing volunteering before some of these may be familiar to you.

In this section of the guide we have provided some examples of solutions to each of the challenges. These solutions were identified by organisations providing micro-volunteering as well as by our research. This section along with the examples earlier in the guidance should provide you with some food for thought on how you might deal with some of the challenges in practice.

Challenge 1: Creating meaningful micro-volunteering opportunities

Solutions

Adapt existing opportunities

Breaking up or 'chunking' existing opportunities into more bite-sized actions. Explore this with roles that people have found too demanding in the past.

Consider remote opportunities and volunteering out of usual office hours

This might help people fit volunteering into busy lifestyles. Offering opportunities to engage online may help you to do this e.g. completing an online survey.

Run events

Events were identified as a good way to engage people in a time-limited way and there could be lots of different kinds of contributions required to make them happen so lots of potential for engagement at different levels e.g. a flash mob.

Be open to volunteer-generated ideas

Talk to existing volunteers and to potential volunteers. Shape your opportunities around the skills and interests of your volunteers. Talking to beneficiaries might also be helpful as micro-volunteering might open up new ways to involve them.

Discuss with other colleagues and teams

Ask to attend their team meetings or invite them to yours. You might also choose to run a workshop session to explore potential opportunities across the organisations.

Run a pilot

Try out and test approaches. Trying things out on a small scale initially with just a few opportunities might be more manageable.

Ensure you are transparent and clear

Micro-volunteers should know what to expect and it shouldn't be mis-sold.

Challenge 2: Managing micro-volunteering

Solutions

Ask people whether they want to stay in touch

Ensure people can find out about new opportunities and keep them updated. Use approaches to enable people to opt out of communications. This gives volunteers some control about how much contact they have with your organisation. E.g. use online social networks that people can join and leave at any time.

Take a joined up approach

Share responsibility for managing and supporting micro-volunteers but ensure everyone is clear about who does what and share information that will help you. Hold a meeting and invite anyone with an interest.

Adopt a more flexible approach

Ensure that management, training and induction don't become too onerous or disproportionate. Some organisations suggested a move towards facilitating and supporting rather than managing.

Consider shadowing

Experienced volunteers could help with supporting new micro-volunteers.

Plan ahead

Core delivery might not depend on micro-volunteers but the extra support they provide may be a bonus and add value on the day e.g. for events make sure you have enough people in case a few people don't turn up.

Use online tools and technology

Facebook¹⁰, Google Calendar¹¹ or Doodle¹² can be used to see what slots people are available for and mobile technology can help people get information on the go.

Think about risk but be sensible

It's important to keep it in perspective. You might want to do a quick risk assessment of the activity as you would with any role.

¹⁰ Facebook, www.facebook.com

¹¹ Google Calendar, https://www.google.com/calendar/

¹² Doodle, <u>http://doodle.com</u>/

Challenge 3: Building relationships with micro-volunteers

Solutions

Give volunteers control over how much contact they have

Use approaches that enable people to opt in or out of communications. You may want to encourage people to keep in touch e.g. entry into a prize draw for signing up to be contacted again in future.

Understand the motivations of your volunteers and what they want from their volunteering

This will help you to ensure they find their volunteering more satisfying and have a more meaningful relationship with your organisation which is good for retention.

Say thank you to your micro-volunteers

Small gestures can make a big difference e.g. thank your micro-volunteers at the end of an event, or thank them online via Facebook, Twitter or a short email.

Communicate about what impact or what difference their contribution has made

Bear in mind the first point about allowing people to opt out of this.

Offer a social event for micro-volunteers or have an online community

Micro-volunteers may want to connect with other volunteers, for some this might add value to their experience as a volunteer.

Recognise that micro-volunteers might come and go

Think about how you will manage this and also demonstrate that you understand and respect this.

5. Measuring impact and evaluation

Measuring, monitoring and demonstrating impact can be difficult for some micro-volunteering activities, particularly when actions are one-offs and there is no on-going relationship between the volunteer and the organisation. It may also take a while to really see an impact e.g. the impact of lots of small actions may be cumulative over time. Organisations involved in our research also said that it can be challenging to weigh up whether it is worth investing in evaluating and measuring the impact of short-term activities. Alternatively for some activities measuring the impact is relatively easy, for example for micro-volunteering opportunities that contribute to fundraising you can measure how much extra money it helped you raise.

Approaches you use for monitoring micro-volunteering need to not overburden volunteers, especially if it takes more time than the volunteering action itself. Some organisations used technology to help them collect data on the number of actions completed. For example, you could ask online volunteers to click a button on your webpage when they complete an action. However this is likely to underestimate participation as not every volunteering action would be recorded. This might not be appropriate for offline volunteers, who may not want to or be able to spend time going online to record their participation. This links to the earlier point on considering carefully what role technology might have.

For some actions the technology might already record this for you e.g. number of re-tweets, number of 'likes' or shares on Facebook. This can be an easy way of collecting information on the impact of some actions e.g. helping to increase the reach of a campaign. However, this does have its limitations and wouldn't provide more sophisticated data about the demographic profile your campaign was reaching.

The research has demonstrated that micro-volunteering can have a positive impact internally for organisations. For example it may help to raise the profile of volunteering in your organisation, bring in specialist skills or help to develop new working relationships. In order to get a sense of how effective this has been you may want to complete a survey with staff or existing volunteers to evaluate whether they have found it helpful or whether it has impacted on their views or the way they work.

When thinking about measuring the impact of micro-volunteering, organisations in our research identified some key questions that helped them think this through. These were:

- What data will you need to collect?
- How or who will collect it?
- Who will analyse it?
- Will this mean more work or cost money? If so, is it worth it?
- What information or data can you share across teams or different parts of the organisation that might help you do this?

6. Further information

Identified below are a range of resources that you may find useful should you wish to read more about this topic.

IVR and NCVO

IVR & NCVO, November 2013, The value of giving a little time Understanding the potential of micro-volunteering http://www.ivr.org.uk/images/stories/micro-volunteering-full-report_071113.pdf

IVR, June 2012, Micro-volunteering: Doing some good through smartphones?

http://www.ivr.org.uk/component/ivr/micro-volunteering-%20doing%20some%20good%20throuhg%20smartphones

Information and resources from the Pathways through Participation project are available through the website here http://pathwaysthroughparticipation.org.uk/

Summary report http://pathwaysthroughparticipation.org.uk/wpcontent/uploads/sites/3/2011/09/Pathways-through-Participation-summary-report Final 20110913.pdf

Volunteering as a participation pathway <u>http://pathwaysthroughparticipation.org.uk/wp-</u> content/uploads/sites/3/2011/09/Pathways-Through-Participation-Volunteering-Briefing-final.pdf

Know How Non-Profit

This site is a place where non-profit organisations can learn and share what they've learned with others. There are a number of 'how-to' guides on micro-volunteering develop and contributed to by organisations doing micro-volunteering.

http://knowhownonprofit.org/how-to/ugc_search?ugctags=microvolunteer

Topics include:

- 'How to set up a micro-volunteering project'
- 'How to engage people into micro-volunteering'
- 'How to create a micro-volunteering opportunity that's attractive to skilled/professional volunteers'

Help from Home

Help from Home have produced a range of guides based on their experience of micro-volunteering and they are available on their website.

http://helpfromhome.org/our-projects/nonprofit-consultancy/microvolunteering-guides

How to develop a micro-volunteering action: A guidebook for charities and non-profits

http://www.helpfromhome.org/microvolunteering-project.pdf

Bespoke support

At NCVO we offer bespoke, specialist advice on volunteering and our Volunteering Development team at NCVO can work with you to develop and facilitate a workshop on micro-volunteering. This would provide you with an opportunity to develop the ideas and understanding of staff in your organisation and to help you come up with practical actions and solutions to develop micro-volunteering. This would draw on the knowledge and experience gained from this research as well as the wider knowledge and experience of the team.

Please email volunteering@ncvo.org.uk with all enquiries or for more information on how we can help you.

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