
Social Media in Volunteering

The information collected in this document has been co-produced by the eight partners in the lifelong learning programme Grundtvig Learning Partnership **Volunteering Validation Highway** (GRU-13-P-LP-236-SV-FI). Here you find information on how social media is used in volunteering around Europe, and especially on how it can be used to validate volunteers' skills and achievements. Enjoy reading!

1. What is the function of social media in volunteering?

- Most examples found in our countries were related to volunteer recruitment and marketing. There are e.g. fan pages on Facebook to promote and organisation. Recruitment sites can be found on social media sites and also linked to volunteer time banks and other similar web pages.
 - Many of the recruitment sites are run by umbrella organisations or otherwise jointly between various organisations.
 - Recruitment sites also offer volunteers a chance to find out about the organisations and the tasks.
 - Marketing is now more interactive with the opportunity to discuss issues and ask organisations questions.
- Some sites, pages or profiles exist for spreading information about volunteering, but they are usually linked to marketing sites.
- Many voluntary organisations or larger NGOs also use various social media platforms for campaigning. This isn't the same thing as marketing even though it shares many similarities.
- Volunteer motivation or networking sites are not as common, but they do exist. We found examples of sites where volunteers can post photos or videos to share their experiences. The groups are often closed ones to foster a team spirit among the volunteers of an organisation, for example. Some similar sites were also open to the public, so they have a double role as they can also be used in marketing to show how much fun volunteering can be.
- Many organisations have an external fan page mainly for marketing purposes and an internal site for communication, planning and sharing ideas. These are usually for members and/or active volunteers.
- Volunteers use some sites for evaluation and validation of the achievements. For example, even though the LinkedIn service is used mainly by professionals, volunteers use it to endorse each other's skills.
- Volunteers use social media to disseminate their achievements and ideas both individually and through their organisations.

2. What is the motivation among volunteers to use social media?



- The motivation varies greatly according to the service that is used: Twitter for fast dissemination, Facebook for sharing ideas, YouTube for campaigning videos, LinkedIn for validation etc.
- The main motivating factors are finding information and sharing ideas.
- Awareness-raising is another driver that keeps volunteers motivated to use social media.
- If volunteers face problems, they are often better solved in a face-to-face situation. Social media isn't too great in this respect.
- Also few volunteers use social media for fundraising purposes, as it doesn't seem to work.

3. How can social media be used to validate volunteers' skills and achievements?

- When volunteers use social media to write about their projects, they are usually already practising self-evaluation and self-validation. They often present what they have been able to do and so on.
- Often for a volunteer, their peers offer the most useful validation: they endorse their skills on LinkedIn, like and share updates and photos etc. Peer validation is seen as fair and democratic and it doesn't have costs.
- Organisations are usually seen as more credible in validating volunteers' competences and achievements. Umbrella organisations allow for collaboration and wider recognition.
 - Organisations can use the idea of peer validation by observing how a volunteer's peers have endorsed their achievements on social media in their validation and recognition activities.
- What does volunteer validation happen? On social media, it happens already before the volunteering activity (on application forms volunteers are often asked to assess their prior skills), during the activity by sharing experiences and after the activity.
 - Concerning skills and competences, real assessment usually only comes after the activity. It often requires input from a more experienced person like a volunteer coordinator.
- There aren't that many tools geared towards volunteer validation, so volunteers use other services like LinkedIn. Ideas for tools:
 - A widely shared skills page for volunteers where they could record their achievements and gain recognition from peers and their organisations. These could be linked with various forms of micro-accreditation like Open Badges etc.
 - Various self-assessment tools can be promoted via social media.
 - Tools could be made to look appealing.
- In some cases but not all, peer validation is enough. In highly centralised countries validation given by voluntary organisations isn't well known. In these countries, all validation needs to be organised in a way that fits existing educational and other structures. In other countries, this kind of validation is taken as useful experience in job interview situations etc.



- This is why voluntary organisations should work in partnership with educational institutions, trade unions and other organisations that offer accreditation if their own validation efforts are not beneficial enough for the volunteers.
- Social media has a decentralising effect: for the volunteer, meaningful validation is more often than before found in virtual communities and so on.
 - The problem with validation that is entirely social media based is that it is more sporadic and subjective in nature than validation done by experts.
 - This could be overcome by using badges and other forms of micro-accreditation that are endorsed by NGOs, and in particular larger umbrella organisations.