

Volunteer Management Software vs. Traditional Methods – Is the switch worth it?

During our July Engagement Chat, special guest **Liz Warner from Habitat for Humanity** (Tompkins and Cortland Counties, NY) joined us to share ideas and strategies for using volunteer management software vs self-created tools like spreadsheets or (gasp!) paper-based systems. **We learned a lot:**

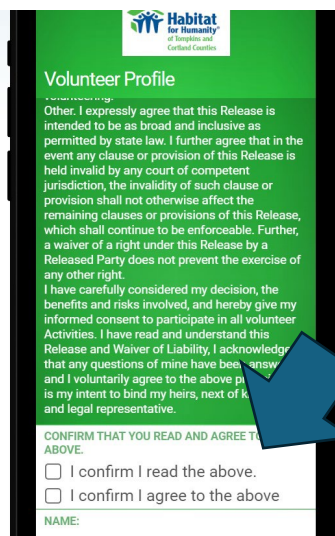
Helper Helper: The App

Liz’s program transitioned to the app “Helper Helper” a couple of years ago, which offers unique and useful options for volunteer management. The app is designed for mobile use – but can be accessed and used on desktops, laptops and tablets as well - and provides an affordable platform for tracking volunteer hours, listing volunteer and project opportunities, and streamlining communication. The program costs about \$550 a year, is user-friendly (and has tech support options) and has innovative features such as photo integration, map functionality, and automated reminders.

Transitioning to Digital: The transition from paper-based to digital volunteer management systems can take time and requires planning. Not all volunteers are equally tech-savvy and organizations may encounter resistance during initial stages from both staff and volunteers – especially since volunteers will need to set

up a profile to sign up for a shift. Though implementing the system will take time, the long-term benefits can be great. One option to help with the transition, if available, is to use college students to help volunteers set up the app and their profiles. Liz’s program asked student volunteers to join

them at events and use tablets to help people create a profile to clock in and download the app onto their personal devices. Once profiles were set up, the app became an intuitive tool for volunteers to find and sign up for shifts on their own.



Liability Waivers: One of the value components of a digital system is the ability to develop, distribute and collect signed liability waivers. Most volunteer software programs will include this feature and provide templates that can be adjusted based on your program guidelines. Language specific to the agency or project can be embedded into the waiver and a checkbox added for the volunteer to select to acknowledge that they’ve read it and understand it and provide a digital signature. The system keeps a full system of all signed waivers which ensures a solid record of waiver compliance.

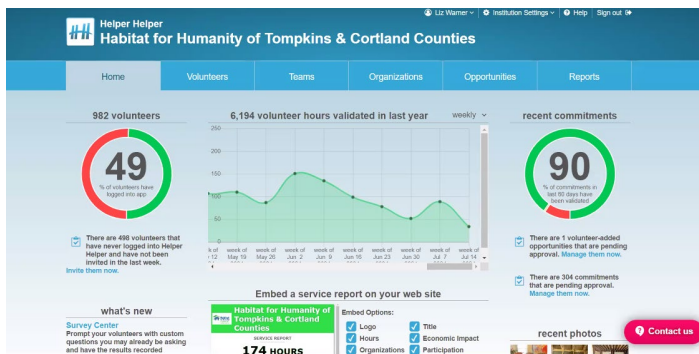
Navigating the Options

Many volunteer management software and systems exist and they are not all created equal. The distinct features of your program will help determine which system is best for you. Some other notable options include:

- Bloomerang
<https://bloomerang.co/>
- Volunteer Hub
<https://volunteerhub.com/platform>
- Volunteer Matters
<https://www.volunteermatters.com/>
- Get Connected by Galaxy Digital
<https://www.galaxydigital.com/>

Other Advantages

Some programs offer a feature to integrate a donation button, which provides a direct pathway for supporters to contribute. Also, the data collected through the app provides the organization with important data that can be used to generate comprehensive reports on volunteer activity, program impact, and outcomes. This information is key to securing funding and showcasing program effectiveness. That data can also help the organization identify peak volunteer periods – demonstrating best (and worst) times to set up different projects. These systems eliminate the need for manual data entry, which is a substantial time saver. Additionally, such platforms allow volunteers to maintain comprehensive records of their time spent and see firsthand their contribution to the organization's mission.



Overall Usefulness and Innovative Features

- Digital sign-ups for available shifts
- Efficient hours tracking
- Centralized lists of volunteer opportunities and shifts
- Photo posting for organizers AND volunteers
- Mapping capacity with directions
- Ability to validate volunteer hours
- Direct communications (emails, push notifications within the app)
- Automated reminders or special requests
- Easy transfer to excel or other program
- Templates or create your own design, volunteer skills analysis, etc.
- Can 'pin' needs and opportunities (we need cookies!)

Other Great Ideas

- ✓ Fundraising button (\$20)
- ✓ Rewards and recognition for volunteers – prizes and kudos
- ✓ Volunteer feedback forms – get input from volunteers (what worked and what didn't)
- ✓ Social media shares – event details, data, photos, success stories, etc.

Our Next Engagement Chat will be October 16 at noon

Zoom: <https://us06web.zoom.us/j/82271449234>

Potential Topics: Conflict management in neighborhoods OR group agreements (e.g. tree felling)