

A Guide to Meeting Essential Service #1

In order to assist Volunteer Centers in meeting Essential Service #1 this guide has been prepared by Points of Light Foundation & Volunteer Center National Network staff and the members of the Volunteer Center National Network Technology Advisory Team (TAT). The guide includes four sections:

1. Essential Service #1 Summary – as Volunteer Centers have begun examining the Affiliation Agreement in preparation for submittal, a number of clarifying questions have been raised about Essential Service #1 and its quality criteria. Below we have provided additional clarification.
2. Volunteer Software Assessment – a number of volunteer matching software applications exist, but not all meet the quality criteria outlined for Essential Service 1. Below we have provided a list of software applications that have been identified as meeting the requirements of Essential Service #1. The providers were selected because of their price and/or because several of the Volunteer Centers in the Volunteer Center National Network are currently utilizing the system, with some level of success. This list is not meant to be exhaustive, but to provide you with recommendations and guidelines if you are considering how to meet Essential Service #1 by choosing a software application.
3. Frequently Asked Questions – as more in-depth conversations have occurred with Volunteer Centers as they assess their ability to meet Essential Service #1 there are some common questions that have been raised. Through the Frequently Asked Questions section, we have tried to answer many of them.
4. Guidelines for choosing a solution to meet Essential Service 1 – while this guide contains clarifying information related to Essential Service #1, the Technology Advisory Team (TAT) has developed additional guidelines to assist Volunteer Centers who currently don't have a solution that meets Essential Service #1 or are considering changing technology. TAT guidelines take into account not only the requirements of Essential Service 1, but also the larger goals of the Network related to technology, including a National Portal.

In addition, we want to remind Volunteer Centers of the current assistance that is available from the Foundation:

- 1-800-Volunteer.org software application and support – the Foundation and Network have developed and maintain a software solution that was built for and by Volunteer Centers. The Foundation and Network offer the software at a subsidized rate based on Volunteer Center budget size. For more information on how you can purchase 1-800-Volunteer.org please contact Katherine Watier, Marketing and Sales, 1-800-Volunteer.org at (202) 729-3231 or KWatier@PointsofLight.org.
- 1-800-Volunteer.org scholarships and grants – the Foundation has conducted two rounds of applications for a free one-year license to 1-800-Volunteer and a \$250 mini-grant to support implementation. A third round will be announced on Monday, December 4th and due on Friday, December 22, 2006. In addition, the Foundation may offer additional rounds in early 2007. For more information contact Jamila Silvera, Volunteer Centers and Community Based Strategies at (202) 729-8135 or JSilvera@PointsofLight.org.
- Technical assistance to assess your current solution – the Foundation staff is available to help review your existing solution to help determine whether it meets Essential Service #1. For more information contact Angela Copeland, Technical Assistance and Strategies at (202) 729-8130 or ACopeland@PointsofLight.org.

Essential Service #1 Summary

Volunteer Centers must have “a web-based, searchable **volunteer-matching software application** that allows individuals and organizations to access and promote volunteer opportunities.” The essential service was created to promote consistent levels of service across the network and to connect volunteers with opportunities to serve. Further clarification on the essential service is provided by the following. A Volunteer Center must have a matching application that:

- ❑ *Is web-based:* Volunteers and agencies can find opportunities, post information, and express interest from any location using the internet.
- ❑ *Is interactive and **searchable**:* Volunteers can input search criteria and location to find opportunities in their area; browsing by category may be considered a good addition to this type of search, **but is not a replacement**.
- ❑ *Provides information and services to all potential volunteers in service area (i.e., does not serve only youth, seniors, etc.):* Volunteer opportunities cross all audiences; it is still highly encouraged to have opportunities that are specific to youth, seniors, or other demographics.
- ❑ *Provides information and services to all qualified nonprofits and organizations in service area (i.e., does not serve only one type of nonprofit/organization such as Meals on Wheels):* Nonprofits should be approved by the Volunteer Center. Nonprofits should represent different social issues and the Volunteer Center should be willing to work with any of these populations to post opportunities to the Web site. Nonprofits should be able to have their own account on the system where they can post opportunities on their own.
- ❑ *Provide accurate and current volunteer opportunities that are updated at least quarterly:* Volunteer Opportunities should be updated and kept fresh to prevent volunteers from finding opportunities that are no longer active (some software providers offer this function automatically); Volunteer Centers should periodically check that opportunities on their Web site are still accepting volunteers.
- ❑ *Provide that potential volunteers can reach the Volunteer Center daily even when it is not open by leaving phone messages, using the Internet, or sending e-mails, and these messages are returned within two business days (excludes holidays) to get follow-up information and/or the information provided on volunteer opportunities allows a volunteer to contact nonprofits/organizations directly to volunteer:* Potential volunteers should be able to express interest using the system at any time and receive communication back from the nonprofit organization or Volunteer Center within two business days; potential volunteers may also contact the Volunteer Center directly through a “contact us” or similar page.
- ❑ *Measure the number of volunteer opportunities posted, number of participating nonprofits/organizations and number of web hits (page views) of volunteer opportunities or number of registered volunteer users:* Volunteers should be able to express interest through the system so that referrals and registrations are captured; nonprofit registrations and their opportunities should be captured in the system.

Volunteer Software Assessment (All data as of November 1, 2006)

Company	Product	Website	Contact	Volunteer Center National Network member Users	Estimated VCNN member Users
Points of Light Foundation*	1-800-Volunteer.org*	www.1-800-Volunteer.org	sales@1800Volunteer.org	Volunteer Center of United Way of Thomas Jefferson, VA (UWA) VolunteerLEON: The Leon County Volunteer Center, FL (Gov't) Volunteer! Baton Rouge, LA	150
United Way of America	Volunteer Solutions	www.volunteersolutions.org	sales@volunteersolutions.org	United Way of Greater Seacoast, NH (UWA) Volunteer Center of Southern Arizona, AZ Arlington County Volunteer Office, VA (Gov't)	90
Hands on Network**	Hands on Network Technology	www.handsonnetwork.org	info@handsonnetwork.org	Hands On Atlanta, GA Hands on Jacksonville, FL Hands On Portland, OR	32
Volunteer ² (squared)	Community Hub	www.volunteer2.com	sales@volunteer2.com	City of Roseville Volunteer Center, CA Volunteer Frederick, MD Many Centers in Canada also use Volunteer	10
Helix Ltd.	Andar Software e-Volunteer	www.andar360.com	info@andar360.com	Metro United Way's Volunteer Connection, KY United Way of Greater Cincinnati, OH United Way Volunteer Center of Toledo, OH	10
Volunteer Software	Volunteer Reporter WITH Web Assistant	www.volsoft.com	info@volsoft.com	While it appears as many as 60 Volunteer Center National Network members are using Volunteer Reporter, it is not clear that any are using it with Web Assistant which is necessary to be compliant with Essential Service #1	

* The Volunteer Center National Network Council (VCNNC) encourages Volunteer Centers that are choosing a new system strongly consider the internal system built by Points of Light and the Volunteer Center National Network (1-800-Volunteer.org) first.

** Currently only available to Hands On Network Affiliates (<http://www.handsonnetwork.org/our-network/>)

Frequently Asked Questions

1. **Do the following services / Web site meet the Essential Service #1: Impact Online (VolunteerMatch.org), Actions Without Borders (Idealist.org), Youth Service American (SERVENet.org), Join Senior Service (JASON), USA Freedom Corps (Volunteer.gov)**

A: While these Web sites and services offer Volunteer Centers additional ways to attract more volunteers, they do not currently meet the requirements of Essential Service 1 for the following reasons:

- A. Volunteer Centers cannot grant agency accounts, and approve the agencies or opportunities posted by agencies on these websites.
- B. Volunteer Centers do not have the ability to point volunteers to a central place where they can search the Volunteer Centers opportunities – many of these Web sites may have the ability to point to a particular page that lists opportunities your Volunteer Center has posted, but it will not contain any opportunities from your agencies or be searchable.
- C. There is no way to track referrals or sign-ups to agencies that register directly with these services.

2. **What are the key areas of the software selection I should pay attention to?**

A. Features, cost, and support

Key features should be those listed in the requirements above as well as the following:

- A. Approve organization accounts and information
- B. Approve opportunities from organizations
- C. Allow organizations to post directly without data entry from Volunteer Center (allows Centers just to approve)
- D. Run reports across all agencies on number of referrals and volunteers
- E. Measures number of hits to your volunteer site
- F. Automatically refresh, expire, and archive opportunities
- G. Manage events (if applicable), service learning (if applicable), RSVP (if applicable)

Cost should be considered for the following elements (some or all of these elements will be included in the cost):

- A. Set-up cost
- B. Data conversation (if moving from a previous system)
- C. Annual fee
- D. Annual support fee (if additional)
- E. Customization fees (designing website, making changes to the functionality)
- F. Additional costs related to Volunteer Center staff and agency training

Support should be considered for the following elements:

- A. Amount of support included
- B. What type of support (phone, email)
- C. Additional types of support (e.g., marketing, organization training)

Guidelines for Choosing a Solution to Meet Essential Service #1

In order to facilitate the consistent delivery of services across the Volunteer Center National Network, Affiliate Volunteer Centers have been asked to undertake delivery of the Essential Services. To deliver the first Essential Service, "Connecting People to Opportunities to Serve," all Centers must have a **Web-based, searchable volunteer-matching software application that allows individuals and organizations to access and promote volunteer opportunities.**

The Points of Light Foundation & Volunteer Center National Network (VCNN) Technology Advisory Team (TAT) is pleased to provide guidelines for choosing a solution to meet this Essential Service. In proposing these recommendations, the Advisory Team kept in mind a long-term goal of establishing a **National Portal** to connect volunteers to opportunities.

These recommendations were presented and approved by the Volunteer Center National Network Council at its October meeting. In addition to approving these guidelines, the Council also agreed to encourage Volunteer Centers to consider 1-800-Volunteer.org first when choosing a new solution to meet Essential Service #1. The Foundation and Network have through joint planning continued to allocate resources to support this application, and while a number of solutions from other providers may meet the requirements of Essential Service #1, we as a system have decided to put our resources into the development and maintenance of this solution.

Below are the full guidelines developed by the Technology Advisory Team. For further information, please contact Co-chairs Chris Sullivan, chris@volunteer.ws or Robin Albert, ralbert@uwgs.org.

- Choose an on-line database application that is **currently being used efficiently and effectively by a large number of Volunteer Centers.**
 - Centers currently using on-line database applications such as 1-800-Volunteer.org, Volunteer Solutions, Hands on Network Technology, and others, are reporting success and satisfaction.
 - Though there are a number of Volunteer Centers reporting success using custom-built systems designed especially for their needs, creating a Web-based solution from scratch is **not recommended.**
 - The Technology Advisory Team would be happy to provide you with the names of staff members from Centers willing to share information regarding their choices of solutions, costs, implementation timelines, etc.
- Choose a Web application that currently shares data with the POLF/VCNN National Portal (these currently include 1-800-Volunteer.org and Volunteer Solutions) or is technically ready to do so (such as Hands on Network Technology).
- Choose a Web application that allows Volunteer Centers the option to **enable partner organizations to register and provide data online.**
 - Enables agencies to log into the Volunteer Center site to post, update and maintain their own information (as opposed to having Volunteer Center staff do it for them), providing agency ownership and responsibility around volunteer recruitment.
 - Frees up Volunteer Center staff time entering data.
 - Enables Volunteer Center staff to manage and edit data.
- Choose a Web application that allows the Volunteer Center to **review and approve organizations and volunteer opportunities prior to going live on the web,** for quality control.
- Choose an application that enables volunteers to e-mail through the on-line matching database, thus tracking their inquiry/referral.