

Learning Report

NCSS Volunteer Management Network 2025 Session 3 was themed **‘Harnessing Technology and Data to Optimise Volunteer Programmes’**. The session focused on how technology can be effectively leveraged to optimise volunteer management efforts for SSAs, and explored some effective technology platforms, such as databases and Artificial Intelligence (AI), to manage volunteers in support of service programmes by SSAs. Participants gained insights on incorporating technology into services/ programmes operations, the benefits of leveraging upon technology, and stakeholder management in their tech-adoption journey.

Pre-VMN Poll

Digitalisation in SSAs: Current Focus and Implementation Stages



A pre-session survey was conducted to gain insights into the current practices and challenges organisations faced in harnessing technology and data to optimise volunteer programmes.

Majority of participants have identified **digitalisation as a key focus** for their organisations, with many in the **planning phase** or in the **early stage of development**. In comparison, a small **minority** have successfully implemented a fully developed digital solution, such as a **Volunteer Management System (VMS)**.

Challenges in Technological Integration for SSAs

The key challenges faced by most participants when integrating digital solutions included **limited skills and access to technology platforms or applications**, and **insufficient resources** to support their implementation. These challenges are further compounded by the **high costs of implementation** and the **lack of user-friendly solutions**.

AI Adoption in SSAs: Low adoption despite growing relevance

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is **increasingly becoming an integral part of work**. However, **majority** of participants and their organisations have **yet to integrate AI** into their operations despite being aware of its potential. Furthermore, while **some are currently exploring AI analytics applications**, a **slightly larger group** of participants has expressed **no current plans to consider AI analytics**.

Panel Speakers



Mr Devanand Ramasandara
Volunteer Manager
Singapore Anti-Narcotics
Association (SANA)



Mr Conan Teo
Assistant Manager
Make-A-Wish Singapore



Mdm Pratibha Kurnool
Head of Social Impact, APJ
Cognizant

Key Insights from Panel Speakers

1. Key benefits of digital tools to empower Volunteer Managers in SSAs



Devanand introduced SANA's **Volunteer Management System (VolCon)** as an example of successful technology adoption through **3 key points: data-driven insights** to optimise service delivery, **automation and efficiency**, and **enhancing volunteers' experience**. Through VolCon, the system allowed staff and volunteers to access clients' information via one platform, and enabled volunteers to submit their observations and case notes from their engagement with clients seamlessly through the platform. Streamlining data collection using VolCon has increased SANA's efficiency for its volunteer-driven counselling and befriending services. It also allowed Volunteer Managers like Devanand, to effectively highlight cases for early intervention through reading volunteers' notes, resulting in an overall decrease in the risk of clients relapsing.



For Make-A-Wish (MAW), **Conan** shared **3 key technological tools** that the organisation adopted: a fully customised **Volunteer Management System**, **Cognito Forms**, and a **Wish App** that centralised and streamlined data collection processes to enhance matching of volunteers to wishes. The VMS was customised to collect additional information of volunteers to more effectively match them to wishes. With the integration of Cognito forms and VMS data to the Wish app, it allowed volunteers to seamlessly take on available assignments, thereby easing the workload for volunteer managers, like Conan.



Pratibha offered her perspective as an IT professional from a corporation - Cognizant. The multi-national company focuses on building tech inclusion in the social sector in Singapore. In addition to providing technology services, the company's employees were also actively engaged in skills provision, such as through skills-based volunteering programmes like Cognizant Synapse. In her work to bring together her colleagues for volunteering programmes, Pratibha uses **two simple tools: Power Automate by Microsoft Suites, and UI path**. The two tools collectively helped in **automating processes and workflows**, thereby increasing the efficiency of her team's work in **volunteer recognition** and coordination of such programmes.

2. Importance of leveraging upon data and technology to optimise service delivery

1

Enhance Efficiency and Productivity

Management systems, such as dedicated VMS like VolCon or CRM systems, automates recruitment, tracks real-time data, and digitalises repetitive tasks. This allows volunteer managers and staff to focus on more impactful engagement and strategic-level tasks. As shared by **Devanand** and **Conan**, SANA and MAW successfully automated volunteer registration, recruitment and matching processes, which has increased their efficiency and productivity.

2

Data-driven Insights for Improved Service

Leveraging upon data in various forms (volunteer and client information, case notes by volunteers, post-engagement feedback survey) enables better understanding of volunteer engagement, clients progress, and overall programme effectiveness. Analysing these data results in early alert for service interventions, helps to refine volunteer training, and improves volunteer placement strategies. Data also aids in impact reporting to relevant stakeholders and provides reliable benchmarks for comparison and future planning of services.

3

Improve Volunteer Experience and Engagement

All three speakers agreed that integrating user-friendly digital solutions and providing a seamless user experience are crucial for engaging volunteers. Integrating engagement points such as feedback surveys and observation notes in a single platform improved volunteers' overall volunteering experience. Speakers also highlighted the importance of including volunteers in the digital transformation journey. This allows for volunteers to feel empowered to co-create user-friendly system together with their organisation, and produce a digital solution that has been tested and validated by volunteers themselves.

3. Key considerations in the tech adoption journey: Stakeholder management and resources

In the digitalisation journey, **all 3 speakers** acknowledged the importance of getting relevant stakeholders involved - volunteers and staff alike. From the discussion, **4 key considerations** were highlighted to increase likelihood of successful tech adoption:

1 Stakeholder Buy-In
Consider introducing technology gradually, through initial conversations with volunteers and staff in early stages to create buy-in. It is also important to identify change advocates, to form a coalition of supportive staff and volunteers to help encourage change. **Devanand** shared that getting a small pool of supporters helped him through the process of promoting VolCon to fellow staff and volunteers in SANA. When communicating with stakeholders, it is also important to acknowledge the challenges brought about by new technology, especially for volunteers and staff who are not technology savvy. However, **Conan** shared that such concerns can be addressed, by showing how digitalisation enhances actual productivity and availing tech-assistance temporarily to those who require transition help.

2 Alignment with Goals
Before considering the different digital tools and technology, organisations should ensure that digital transformation aligns with organisational goals. Understanding “why” is crucial, as it allows organisations to better identify the reasons for integrating technology and in selecting appropriate tools. Both SANA and MAW aligned their adoption of VMS as a result of clear goals in engaging clients and volunteers in a seamless way, while automating identified processes. Consistent communication also ensures that all stakeholders are kept informed, and regular updates are encouraged to increase buy-in and constant alignment towards set organisational goals.

3 Data Literacy and Management
As staff and volunteers have varying degrees of technology skills, **all three speakers** shared the importance to ensure that data collection is seamlessly integrated into the data management systems, to reduce complicated workflows and reduce data collection fatigue. For SANA’s VolCon, **Devanand** shared that he uses pre-filled options and avoids open-ended questions to make surveys quick and easy to complete. **Conan** further detailed that MAW’s Wish app was developed with the end-user’s accessibility in mind, to ensure that volunteers can easily access client data and key in their observation notes using their phone while they engage in wish-granting activities.

4 Celebrate Small Wins
In early stages of adoption journey, **Devanand** emphasised the importance of acknowledging the small achievements. For SANA, Devanand recorded the achievements of VolCon during its early adoption phases, and showed the evidence to his colleagues, management team and volunteers. In return, sharing of these small wins helped increase stakeholder buy-in and eased the process of tech adoption in SANA.

4. Exploration of new technologies and other useful tools

Digitalisation is not only about VMS but includes other online tools, especially with rapidly increasing open source and accessible tech to leverage on. In the session, we asked our speakers what are some of these tools that they have used. Here are some of the collective new technologies shared:

AI-Driven Solutions:



- AI Chatbots such as **Chat GPT**, **Google Gemini**, **Deepseek** and **Perplexity AI**. AI Chatbots can be used for volunteer support, by providing immediate feedback and answers to common questions posed by volunteers or clients. This can help to free up staff time as addressing Q&A are now automated.

Automation Tools:



- In addition to **Pratibha’s** sharing of **Power Automate** and **UI Path** that are powered by Microsoft Suites, other tools such as **Co-pilot**, **Zoom AI Companion**, and **Microsoft Forms** are some examples of AI-integrated enhancements within existing tools that help to automate certain processes in our day-to-day work. Co-pilot and AI Companion can help organisations analyse, organise and synthesize online discussions in real time; while Microsoft Forms have in-built AI capability to generate an entire set of questions based on a project description and objectives.



Creative Tools and Digital Platforms:

- Video or graphic designing tools such as **Canva** and **CapCut** are helpful to create unique marketing materials.

All three speakers emphasised that before investing heavily in new technology, organisations should explore open-source technology and in-built AI functions that comes with current softwares and platforms. They further advise to continuously upskill staff and volunteers in the use of these technology. Lastly, the speakers warned of over-investing in technology, as often simpler solutions can achieve the same results.

Key Quotes by Panellists



Devanand emphasises the importance of change management when introducing new technology. He recognises that staff and volunteers may feel intimidated by new systems and question the need for change. This resistance often stems from a belief that current methods are sufficient, fear of the unknown, or a lack of confidence in using the new technology. By implementing effective change management strategies, organisations can facilitate a smoother transition, gain stakeholder buy-in, and maximize the impact of digital tools.

"Change, especially involving new technology can be very intimidating for many staff and volunteers. Some may question the need for change, believing that existing processes are just working fine... change management strategies actually play a very, very crucial role in guiding the process of introducing and integrating in those systems"



Conan dispels the misconception that implementing technology requires deep technical expertise. He emphasises that successful tech adoption is a collaborative effort, where seeking help and valuing diverse perspectives are key. By involving different stakeholders in building systems like CRMs, organisations can foster teamwork and ensure the final product effectively meets everyone's needs.

"You don't necessarily have to be the expert when it comes to building the CRM. There will always be help around, every opinion matters. You just have to take it in and discern."



Pratibha advises organisations to maximise the use of existing resources before investing in new technologies. This approach is especially relevant for organisations in the social service sector with budget constraints or limited technical expertise. She highlights the value of exploring available AI and applications, suggesting that many challenges can be addressed by leveraging tools they already have.

"Explore the AI that already exists. Explore the applications that you already have access to, and then your mindset should be the mindset of being curious and ensuring the best. Then, you can get the best out of technology."

