iCanHelp is a volunteer-based platform developed as part of the legacy planning for the 2010 Winter Olympic Games in Vancouver.

The online platform is an end-to-end resource management tool focused on servicing sporting events and related activities with volunteers. It has been specifically designed to match the demand side in the form of event organisers with the supply side in the form of local citizens keen to volunteer their time and service.

Event organisers such as city authorities, local sports clubs and societies and even private interests can obtain access once their event has been approved. They can then use the tool to recruit volunteers, searching and filtering based on their relevant criteria, and then to communicate with these volunteers when performing their initial outreach. When it comes to delivering the event in question, the software allows the event organiser to manage the volunteers between the various event sites and activities, tracking their hours and monitoring their assignments to optimise the event delivery.

Volunteers can access the programme to create a profile for themselves and submit their own relevant information as they see fit. Preferences such as the type and duration of event, the sport in question and seasonal availability are all centrally recorded and stored on the iCanHelp platform. The software maximises the probability that the individual is matched to the most suitable role based on their personal data and preferences.

The programme was initially introduced to develop a regulated and streamlined volunteer system for the City of Richmond as part of its contribution to the organisation of the 2010 Winter Olympics.

The system has remained in place as part of the legacy for the 2010 Winter Olympics. Over 9,000 volunteers are registered on the database and this has contributed to the successful staging of numerous sporting events in the years since the Vancouver Games.
OBJECTIVES

Develop human capital and generate social cohesion

The iCanHelp team sought to develop a “one-stop” system, centralising all the key activities that are involved in a fully functioning volunteer system. The benefits of these were seen as twofold. Firstly, an intangible asset would be created for the City, introducing an intelligent system that reduced inefficiencies associated with offline traditional volunteer models. Secondly, through this development, this new system would provide a much easier access to the public at large to volunteer opportunities. This helped to engender a spirit of volunteerism within the local population.

Promote social and constructive behaviour

The City of Richmond is simply not large enough to be involved in the organisation of Olympic competition by itself in the near future. The contributory role it played in the Vancouver Games was therefore seen as a truly unique opportunity to leverage the power of the Olympic Games as a force for positive social development. The City recognised volunteerism as one of the core elements of the Olympic movement and its fundamental link to the Olympic values. The campaign around attracting people to the platform relied heavily on the aspirational and motivational power of these values, bringing record numbers of citizens together in a spirit of social accord.

PRACTICAL INFORMATION

Internal & External Stakeholders

The City of Richmond
Local sports clubs and event organisers
Richmond Olympic Experience
Richmond Animal Protection Agency
Richmond Food Security Society
Richmond School Yard Society

Finance and Cost

The once-off capital cost of the iCanHelp software was CN$ 50,000 (around € 34,000). Annual expenditure of CN$ 75,000 (around € 50,000) is spent on staff with CN$ 15,000 (around € 10,000) spent on software maintenance.

Annual expenditure is funded by the City of Richmond Community Service Department.
Use of the Olympic Brand

Being specifically developed as part of the legacy programme of the 2010 Vancouver Games, iCanHelp incorporated the use of the Olympic brand heavily. The explicit branding has been incrementally reduced in the years since the conclusion of the Games, but an intangible link has remained in the minds of the local public.

Human Resources and Time

There is one full time staff member dedicated to the programme. This covers managing the software and dealing with the day-to-day interactions with users.

EVALUATION

The iCanHelp platform is evaluated on a statistical basis. Key figures such as number of registered users, hours of volunteer work delivered, trends in activities, etc. provide a sound basis to monitor the success of the tool and introduce adjustments if needed.

KEY CHALLENGES

Reaching non-technical individuals

The iCanHelp platform is a powerful tool and capable of many different functions. The software contains many fields, can perform a wide range of analysis and offers a host of support tools. The extent to which event organizers or society members can maximise the opportunities that can be derived from the software tends to depend on their technical competence. Even at entry level, some basic understanding of technology and computing is required and this can serve to block otherwise willing individuals from engaging with the system.

To reduce the barriers to entry for non-tech savvy users, the City provides quick but consistent training courses for new users to help to guide them through the process. This process also helps to mitigate the effects of knowledge drain in organisations where there is high staff turnover.

Protecting data privacy

There is a huge amount of data housed on the iCanHelp programme. This covers basic demographic information on each individual registered, as well as their personal preferences, contact details and trends in terms of volunteer work. Clearly, this challenges across a scope of areas. Firstly, the organisers needed to make sure that this data was securely stored and protected against external theft or access. Secondly, they needed to ensure full compliance with all the prevailing legal standards around storing data. Finally, users needed to be reassured and unconcerned that providing their data was not an issue.

From the outset, the City of Richmond data security and compliance was one of the key priorities around the project. A premium was placed on ensuring that all user information requests and storage was around non-sensitive and required data.
only. Agreements were made with all partners that guaranteed the security of all data accessed through the iCanHelp platform.

KEY LEARNINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Leverage be easy to remember

While the iCanHelp platform reaps the benefits of the interconnected computer age, it also has to compete for attention within this incredibly congested space. The first step in this process began with the choice of name. ‘iCanHelp’ was specifically chosen because it is easy to remember, it is relatable and it conveys the technological element at the heart of the platform. A further downstream benefit of this name selection was its positive response rate from search engine returns. This helped to direct even more users to the platform, building a critical mass quickly.

Build a shared vision

Starting with a shared vision is critical to producing a great product. The City knew that gaining the input of as many stakeholders as possible would make the final tool more useful and comprehensive. However, they also knew that this process would help to generate greater buy-in, building momentum behind the launch and eventual success of the system. When all stakeholders feel that they were involved in defining the vision of the product, conflicts are averted more easily and decision making is accelerated. This was particularly important around complex and sensitive areas such as data protection and approval of event organiser access, for example.

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http://www.icanhelp.richmond.ca
http://www.richmond.ca/parksrec/about/volunteer.htm