# Using Google Docs and the Web to Manage and Recruit Volunteers

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## Abstract

*Recruiting and managing volunteers in programs can be difficult and time consuming. Using Google Docs can be an effective way to reach a more diverse volunteer base, to direct volunteer opportunities, and to manage volunteer data. The purpose of this article is to walk the reader through the process of using Google Docs and the related applications in coordination with the internet to save time and to facilitate successful volunteer recruitment and management.*

**Key Words**: volunteers, management, recruitment, Google Docs

## Introduction

Volunteers can be invaluable to any successful program. However, management and recruitment are two of the most difficult aspects in the world of volunteers (Sinasky & Bruce, 2007; Smith & Finley, 2004). Many times managing volunteers takes so much time that in the end having volunteers at your event may cost too much time and effort to seem worth it. In addition, volunteers are feeling time pressures related to volunteering that may limit their participation (Merrill, 2006). Previous research has shown that using tools can increase volunteer success and reduce the need for time-consuming practices (see Culp et al., 2009). One solution may be to use readily available and affordable technology to reach a large and diverse audience of volunteers in the recruitment process which can also help us become more efficient in how we utilize the valuable time of both volunteers and paid personnel. The purpose of this article is to outline the use of Google Docs in coordination with organizational websites to save time and to facilitate successful volunteer recruitment and management. Having information available at their fingertips makes it more likely that volunteers are informed about your programs and volunteer opportunities. They

can easily see where they can help and can sign up in a matter of minutes.

**Google Docs**

Google Docs (short for documents) is a free online service offered by Google. This application allows a person to post a document that others can view in real time. With a little knowledge of how the application works, it can be an invaluable for recruiting and managing volunteers. It allows volunteers to see the volunteer opportunities that are available. In the following example, we will use Google Forms, one of many applications available through Google Docs.

Google Form

A Google Form is basically an electronic survey that allows for viewing or sharing with others. As a result, a document created by a supervisor to collect contact information from volunteers can be shared with a secretary who can use the information to remind them of upcoming events. The survey or Form is something that you can create with your own questions which then populates to a spreadsheet. The following example will outline how to use a Google Form to collect volunteer information for specific events. Creating a Google Form is done by going to the Google Docs home page and creating a new Form (see Figure 1). There are three screens related to any Form. The editing screen (available to you), the survey screen (available to volunteers), and the excel screen (available to you).

Editing Screen

The editing screen is where you create your electronic survey. You can create questions that have many types of response choices (e.g., text, choose from a list, scale, paragraph, etc.).

There is a place on this screen to title your survey, name your questions, and choose answer types (see Figure 2). The name of the questions (e.g., First Name) becomes the column name (e.g., First Name) on your Excel sheet, so pick titles that will help you know what information you are collecting. As a note, the questions will appear in the order you enter them on this screen. The editing screen is fairly user friendly in letting you move or delete questions; however, this does not always change the questions to the same order on the Excel sheet.

At the very bottom of the editing screen is the link you will use to give out people to access the Form. The link can then be easily included in emails you send out to existing volunteer lists, or embedded into a volunteer website that anyone can visit to see all the volunteer opportunities available with your organization.

Survey Screen

When people click on your link they are taken to the survey. This view allows them to enter their data and submit it. There is an option within the editing screen that allows you to change the "theme" of the Form. You can pick different templates done by Google to change the colors, font, and appearance of the Form that people see.

Excel Screen

When someone fills out and submits information on your Form, the spreadsheet will automatically populate. It is helpful to test your whole Form by entering in sample data to see if information is populating to the spreadsheet correctly.

Once you have finished gathering data or if you need to deactivate the form, you can do so by clicking on "accepting responses". The default for this feature is that it is on until turned off. You can access

the editing screen again if you need to adjust questions.

The Form automatically saves every few seconds, but you can also manually save it under the file menu. In addition, you can download the spreadsheet into a couple of different formats, including Excel. This feature is useful if you have gathered data and would like to save it on a desk top or flash drive, but would like to clean out the online version so it is easier to read and manage. You can also print the Form from here as well. There are several places that have the "share" option to give others access to viewing and editing the Form, this screen is one place it is found.

## Implementation

Our society is moving more and more towards one-stop-shopping and we need to have the management of volunteers move with it. Programs and resources that are not utilizing a website are often left by the way side. Implementing Google Forms is easily done on an organization website.

Strive to give potential volunteers as much information as possible through this tool. Volunteers are more comfortable when they know what they are committing to. This also gives them more freedom of choice. Figure 7 is an example of a website that shows all the volunteer opportunities with updated availability and needs. It is useful for both volunteers and staff to see current needs.

## Limitations

There are some limitations related to using this tool. First, in order to access these free applications you need to have a GMail account. However, those filling out the form do not, they simply need internet access. Next, the online version of the spreadsheet

has some differences in formatting and features from the desktop versions of Excel. If this is bothersome, you can download the data to the desktop version.

## Conclusion

Google Forms is an excellent way to recruit and manage volunteers and connect them with event opportunities. It can be used to quickly gather information from volunteers and fill volunteer needs with efficient use of time, while managing the information in a spreadsheet or Excel. This tool has easy access via a link given to volunteers through email or an organizational website dedicated to volunteers. The efficiency of managing volunteers in this way saves valuable time and money, which are things we all need.

## References

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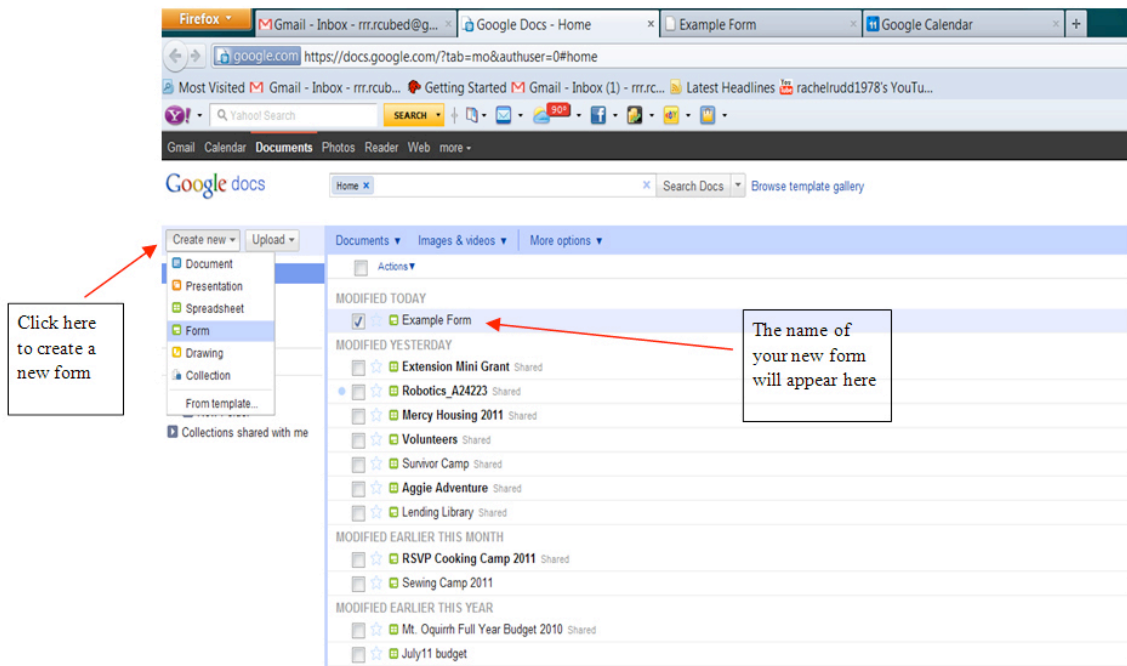
*Figure 1.* Creating a Google Form from Google Docs.
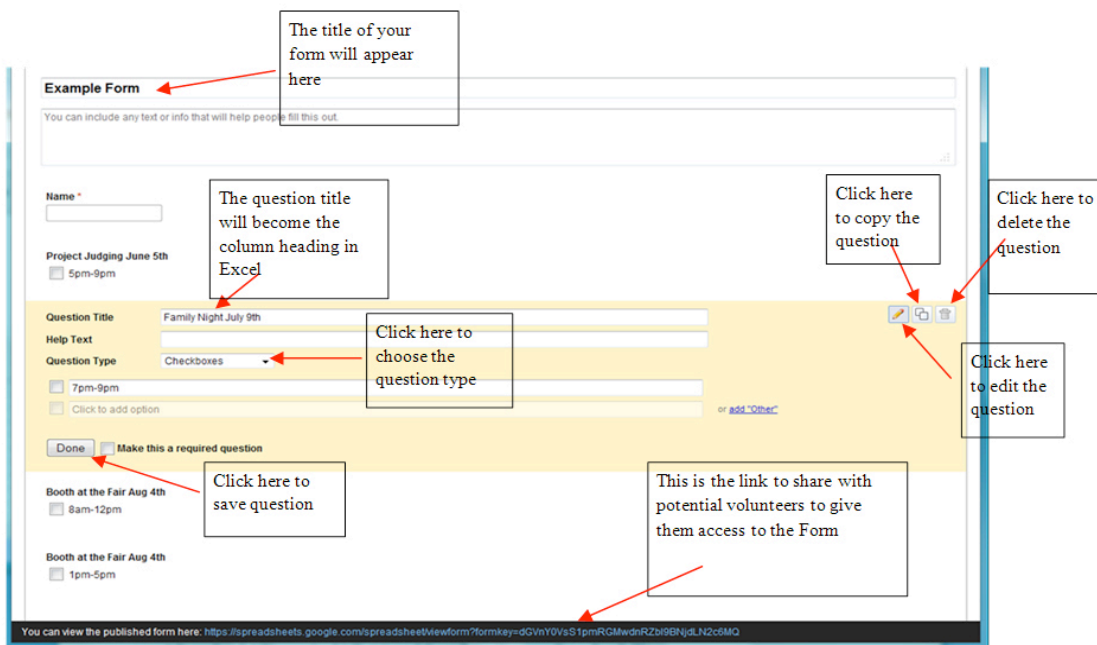


*Figure 2.* The editing screen.

*Figure 3.* The survey screen: What the volunteer actually sees.
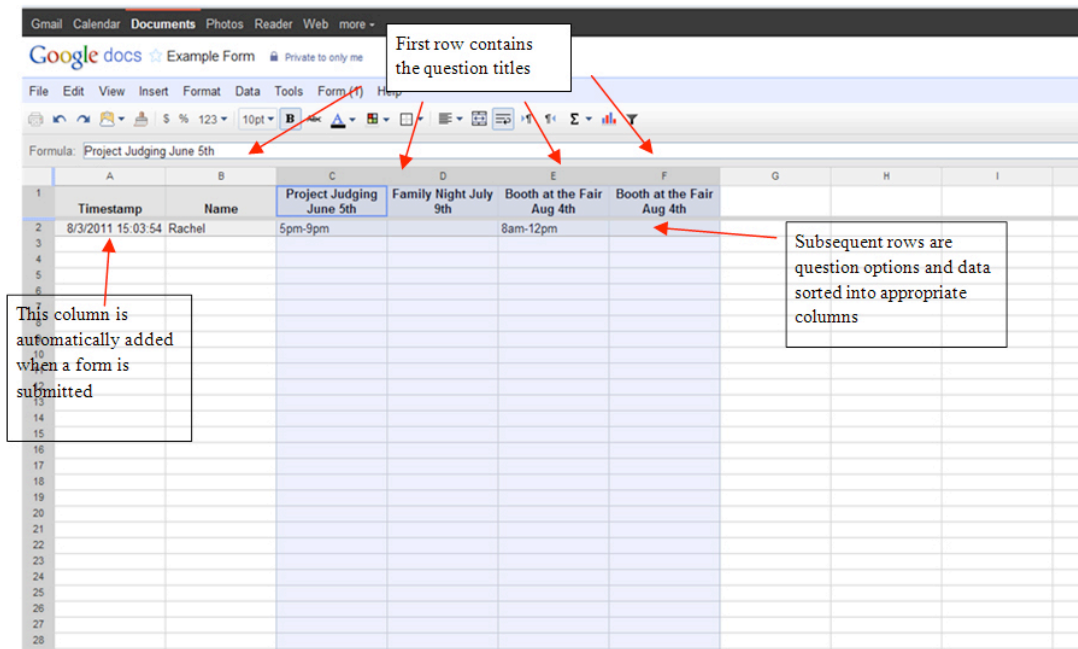
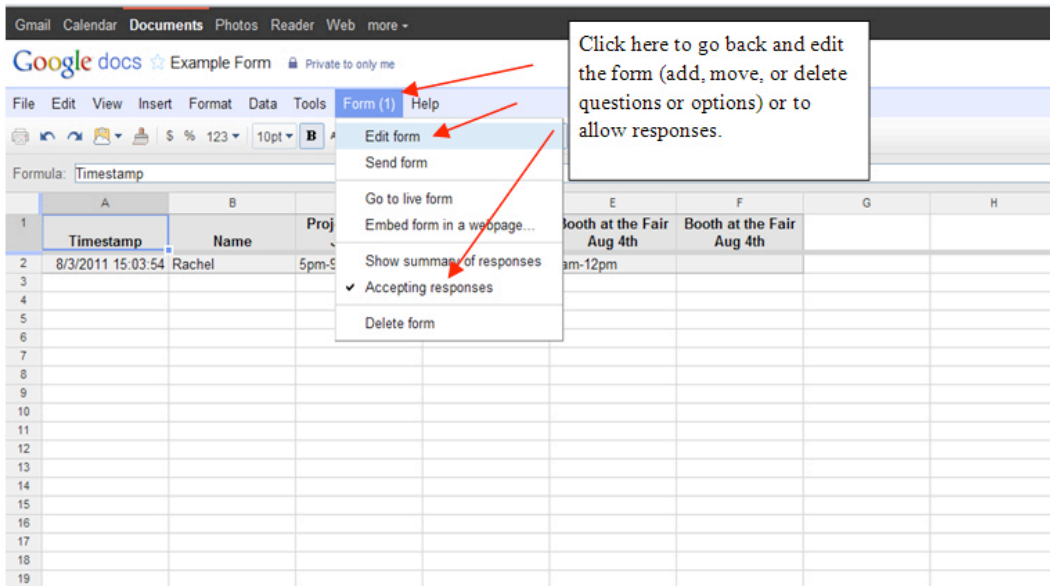*Figure 4.* The Excel screen: Viewed within Google Docs.



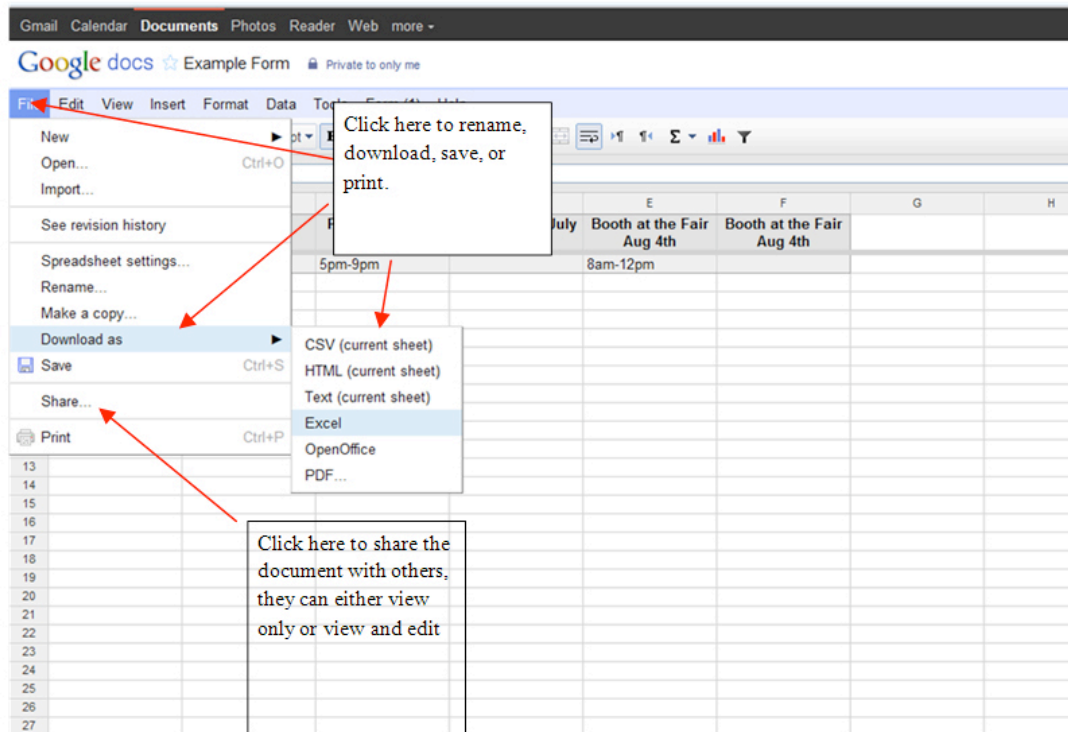*Figure 5.* Editing the Google Form and accepting responses.

*Figure 6.* Saving, downloading, and sharing.

*Figure 7*. One-stop-shop of volunteer opportunities.