Digital Literacy Foundation

A Guide to Volunteering with DLF

Welcome to DLF

Acknowledgement

The Digital Literacy Foundation acknowledges the Traditional Owners of Country throughout Australia and recognises Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander continuing connection to land, waters and community. We pay our respects to Elders both past and present.

Thank you for joining the DLF team and becoming part of our movement to create inclusion and bridge the digital divide. All of this could not happen without the power of volunteers. We welcome you warmly and we value your commitment to bettering your community while investing in yourself.

We trust that you will enjoy all the benefits that come with volunteering, including benefits to your health, wellbeing, and perspective. DLF is offering remote volunteering opportunities so you can continue to contribute in a meaningful way supporting those who need it most. We are committed to ensuring you are properly equipped for your role for the duration of your time volunteering with DLF as we adjust our programs in accordance with ongoing COVID-19 mitigation.

This handbook contains basic information to get you started in your volunteer duties. There will be further information and training specific to your role provided on a regular basis.

We sincerely hope you enjoy your time with DLF and that you find volunteering a rewarding and satisfying experience.

What is a Tech Mate?

A Tech Mate is a digital mentor that provides one-on-one support to help people learn about technology and use it confidently and safely. You don't need to be a tech wiz for this role - you just need an understanding of basic technology skills and some patience! You could be asked to help out on a phone, laptop, tablet or computer. The mentoring model allows learners to learn at their own pace and receive tailored support to build digital skills. A Tech Mate is not an IT professional.

With COVID-19 we are expanding our usual face to face support to offer a remote service via phone and/or video chat. We have added a specialist Tech Mate role to support learners with specific tech needs such as setting up and troubleshooting internet connections, device purchases, data plans, remote software issues and cyber security.

Supporting people to be online is an important task. As a Tech Mate you can make a difference in people's lives by sharing your knowledge and offering social and digital support to those who would otherwise be isolated.

As the COVID-19 pandemic impacts on our community, more and more services are looking for a tech solution without considering the millions of Australians who lack the basic equipment, affordable data and digital skills to use them. Our ability to leverage technology is now critical and the effects of being offline have never been more severe. The mindset that technology is not for everyone puts lives at risk in this new age of isolation.

Digital literacy isn't just about technology - it's a life skill that improves a person's overall wellbeing. With improved digital engagement we're ensuring economic and social equity for all Australians.

Core characteristics of a Tech Mate

Basic Digital Literacy

A Tech Mate should have a good understanding of how to perform basic technology tasks and of basic technology concepts.

It is not necessary to be an IT wiz, or know all the answers!

Empathy

A Tech Mate must be able to empathise with the learner.

It is important never to judge or make assumptions about a learner and to understand how scary technology can be to some.

Patience

Patience is key in the mentoring journey.

Learners might require a lot of repetition in order to learn certain tasks. It is important never to express frustration, as this discourages the learner. Always use positive reinforcement and work at the pace of the learner.

Start with a conversation

Before starting to use technology with a learner, have a conversation with them to get to know them better. Find out what essential services they need help accessing, what they are interested in, what goals they might have and what they already know.

This will help you build rapport with your learner, plan their learning journey and help motivate them by incorporating their interests into their learning.

The learner's responses to the New Learner Form, completed by DLF Staff will be available to you to help get you started.

Some Important Skills

Using appropriate language

» Use simple language

» Avoid too much jargon

» Explain jargon where necessary

» Use short, clear sentences

» Use metaphors that reference a learner's prior knowledge to explain concepts. E.g. "a password is like a key"
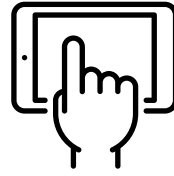
Showing, not doing

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Common Topics

Common tasks you will help out with during a mentoring session include:

» Searching the internet

» Navigating a device

» Setting up online accounts

» Using video calls

» Using social media

» Using apps

» Texting and making calls
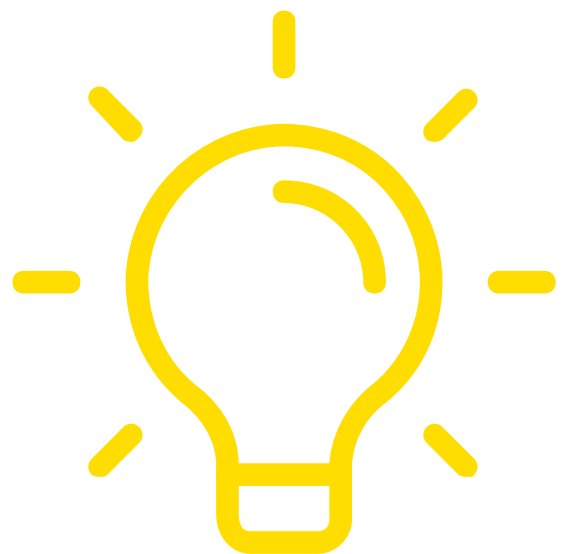
Boundaries and Privacy

Tech Mates often form a close relationship with their learner. It is important that Tech Mates maintain healthy boundaries with the learner and that the privacy of both the Tech Mate and learner is protected.

Never share any passwords! If a learner is prone to forgetting their password, get them to write down a cryptic clue to remind themselves. Eg. "my house number plus middle name with a dollar sign"

At DLF we know from experience that many older people don't feel comfortable answering private numbers.

When we complete an intake assessment with a new learner we always explain the boundaries of the program. If you have any concerns with using your personal number for mentoring please talk to the Manager of Volunteering.

Be friendly and professional with a learner. For learners, the social aspect of mentoring can be very important.

Remember you're not a counsellor. Don't give personal advice or get involved with a leaner's personal matters.

If you're concerned for a learner's health or safety, let the Manager of Volunteering know straight away and they can take appropriate action.

If you're feeling uncomfortable or unsafe with a learner please leave the session and immediately report any concerning behaviour to the Manager of Volunteering.

Common Challenges

You're not sure how to do something

As a Tech Mate, you're not required to know everything! Sometimes a learner might ask you about something you've never done, or there might be a tricky task they're confused about.

Suggestion:

Often the easiest way is to simply Google how to do the task. It's also sometimes best to just figure it out by playing with the device to find the solution if you are holding an in-person session, and then going back and showing the learner once you've learnt yourself. For sessions over video chat you can try guiding the learner to use a feature to share your learner's screen. You can ask other Tech Mates within your Area via online chat or SMS/phone call. Remember sessions are only for basic digital literacy support.

Requests for expert advice

Sometimes people ask Tech Mates for help that falls outside the expertise of the role. This could include asking what device or plan to purchase, how to fix hardware, or generating content for them.

Suggestion:

It is best to remind a learner that you can't provide expert advice. There will be specialist Tech Mates that you'll be able to refer tofor support with specific technical issues. Where possible, refer a learner on to a place where they can receive appropriate support. For example, if a learner asks for help creating a CV, you could help them learn to use Word, but if they need support with what to put in the document, they could be advised to visit an employment agency.

Often learners ask what to buy. Instead of giving advice, prepare your learner for a discussion they might have with a salesperson at a shop like JB Hi Fi. Together make a list of needs and questions they could take into the shop with them.

Keeping Focus

Technology is a big subject! Often learners have lots of questions and answering one question can create three more.

Suggestion:

If a learner is losing focus, try and redirect them to the task at hand. Tell them that you will eventually get to all their questions, but that learning a skill is the priority. Sometimes having a quick break can help a learner to refocus. It's important to stay on task and get in quality learning rather than answering lots of little questions.

Common Challenges

Keeping Time Boundaries

It can be hard to end a session on time. Some learners in particular might be more prone to taking up extra time.

Suggestion:

Tell a learner how much time they have at the beginning of a session, and start wrapping up 10 minutes early because the learner will usually start asking questions. You could set an alarm to sound at the end of the session.

Managing Frustration

Occasionally learners get frustrated in sessions, especially if they find a task difficult. This may happen more frequently during remote learning sessions, as there are additional challenges when you cannot be sitting next to your learners and their devices.

Suggestion:

Remember that the frustration is usually at the technology, not at you. One quick fix is to take a quick break. Try and manage expectations if you think a task might be too hard for a learner's current understanding and break down complex tasks into smaller steps. Often validating someone's frustration is effective in helping them feel better; be empathetic and express your understanding that the task is difficult or that they are upset.

If a learner is aggressive or overly frustrated, please refer to the guidelines in the boundaries and privacy section above.

Position Descriptions

DLF NGO
Position: Tech Mate

Organisation Overview

DLF enables people to use technology in an increasingly digital world. We support all people to build digital skills and confidence, to close the digital divide and reduce social and economic exclusion through one-on-one digital mentoring provided by volunteers.

We welcome high achievers, who share our passion for social justice and inclusion, can engage with a variety of stakeholders (older and poorer Australians, people with disability, people from other cultures/ refugees, potential partners and donors), are digitally savvy and are excited to take on new challenges with initiative and creativity.

We're passionate about creating an inclusive community that promotes and values diversity. We strive to create a safe space for all people regardless of age, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, ethnicity, nationality, religion, physical or mental ability.

Making volunteering accessible is important to us, if you would like to discuss any support or adjustments you may need please let your coordinator know.

Position Overview

The Tech Mate voluntarily shares their digital skills and knowledge with community members remotely or in-person at a DLF program. Under our remote program, areas may include learners local to a region and Tech Mates from across Australia. Our face to face programs take place at various venues in conjunction with local partners, such as neighbourhood centres, community organisations, retirement villages, cafes, halls and libraries.

In this role, you will provide learners with one-on-one support to improve their technology skills. This may include support on a mobile phone, tablet or laptop. The COVID-19 outbreak has created a desperate need to support those Australians that are isolated in their homes without the skills to use technology. As a Tech Mate your work will help to ensure that all Australians have access to essential services such as Telehealth, as well as being able to order groceries online, and remain connected to family and friends.

The minimum commitment required for this role is 26 hours which could be 2 hours every week for 13 weeks (or longer if you're unable to commit weekly to this role) though we hope you will stay longer.

We completely understand that there may be occasions where you need a short break, or need to withdraw from the program altogether. Please tell us immediately so we can make sure that your learner is not left without support.

Characteristics of an Ideal Candidate

The Tech Mate will display the following characteristics:

» A love for guiding users through a fun and creative learning process.

» Possess good customer service and communications skills, the ability to work with professionals and maintain confidentiality standards.

» A passion for digital inclusion and volunteerism.

Responsibilities

» Be matched with a learner and manage this relationship by negotiating the time for mentoring that suits both parties.

» Review learner needs based on the New Learner Form in the database portal.

» Maintain session records and any system requirements in the database portal.

» Provide regular feedback to the Volunteer Manager (or other nominated staff member).

» Respond promptly to emails/phone calls from DLF staff.

» Attend briefing and training sessions as requested.

» Assist with other appropriate and relevant tasks such as distributing flyers to promote our program, being an advocate and speaking about the program to community groups, and assisting with recruiting learners and Tech Mates.

Required Skills, Knowledge and Qualifications

Skills:

» Rigorous attention to detail and ability to follow processes

» Good interpersonal skills with an ability to communicate effectively with a variety of people including older and poorer Australians

» Patience and a willingness to support others on their learning journey

» Reliable and responsible

Knowledge:

» Understanding of technology and basic internet skills

» Willingness to learn DLF's systems for data collection

Qualifications:

» No formal qualifications are required

Other:

» A passion for social justice and the importance of digital inclusion

Work Health and Safety

DLF NGO is committed to Work Health and Safety (WHS) practices which reduce risk, prevent injuries and promote work satisfaction. DLF NGO strives to provide all staff, clients, volunteers, and board members with a safe and healthy environment.

All team members are responsible for identifying any WHS issues. These issues must be reported to the WHS Representative who will then undertake appropriate action.

Mandatory Requirements

» Must be over 18 years of age
» Must be able to travel to and from a DLF program (when required)
» Must undergo a National Criminal Records Check

For more information, please contact:

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