



# VolunTool

The volunteer tool for *schools*

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## Problem Statement

For many high school students, getting involved in extracurriculars should be part of daily life whether it is to gain valuable life skills or make their profile more attractive. According to the United Census Bureau, about 57% of students of ages 6-17 participate in at least one extracurricular activity. In the long run, participation in extracurriculars can help students use these learned experiences from volunteering in non-profits to help them succeed in their college coursework and career. Unfortunately, many students don't have the time, resources and money participate in school sports, music programs and other extracurricular clubs which hinders them from developing the necessary interpersonal skills that can help them foster in their academics and professions. In other words, in many high schools, especially ones that lack funding or support, students don't have the financial resources to develop skills without paying loads of money to buy sports gear, driving to club meetings and paying for exorbitant organization registration fees.

However, students can obtain similar skills and experiences by volunteering with non-profit organizations-all for free! But this temporary solution brings up another problem. Currently, there is no platform that compiles volunteer opportunities geared specifically towards students. In fact, one of the main reasons that high school students don't volunteer more is because they lack the time and effort to dedicate to finding opportunities nearby and ones that they are interested in. Schools may not have prominent visibility or an efficient way of marketing their opportunities in the community and therefore, students have a difficult time finding volunteer opportunities that relate to their interests and skills let alone finding any opportunities at all.

Currently, there are a few solutions to help people find volunteer opportunities like VolunteerMatch or idealist.org. However, these platforms are directed to the general public and are difficult to navigate. More specifically, there are no platforms that can help schools and students involved directly to scope out volunteer opportunities or organizations to work with, especially ones that are location based. Results from our interviews show that one of the main reasons why students are not involved in extracurricular activities is due to lack of access to platforms that help students find geographically nearby opportunities and ones that they can resonate with while saving them time and money in the navigating process. In summary, there is a lack of applications geared specifically towards students that don't need to dedicate a lot of time on top of their already time-consuming school-work and college applications to find ways to get involved in their local and global community.

In our solution, we want to address the problem of developing a platform geared towards the needs of the student. To reiterate, we hope to bridge the discrepancies in bringing volunteer opportunity information to students while helping them recognize which of those opportunities can help them. With that being said, we want to develop something that is easy to navigate and displays all the necessary information in a meaningful way.

## Solution

In order to solve our problem, we decided to create an app that seamlessly matches students, particularly high school students, with volunteer opportunities based on their preferred location and skills that they want to develop. VolunTool can help students grow skills that they might not be able to learn in school by connecting them to volunteer opportunities that can peak students' interests.

One of the main problems that we want to address is the lack of time that students have to scope out opportunities, especially ones where each student can resonate with and are geographically accessible. We solve this by designing an app that students actually are willing to use easily and quickly with our visual and interactive map, search capabilities as well as the simple application process.

Our app compiles and visually presents information about nearby non-profit organizations and particular skills that students can develop by volunteering with that organization. This also gives students an opportunity to take action on causes they care about like environmental sustainability, poverty, and access to education. If a student is interested in an organization, they can take advantage of our one-click apply button that sends the user's resume to the organization and start the conversation between the student and the organization to determine if there is a match.

On the back-end, our app would have a feature where organizations can register themselves on our platform or schools can manually add these opportunities. However, for the scope of this project, we are focusing on elements that are user-facing intended for students.

Since our app is targeted towards students, we will focus on marketing our app to schools, especially the career centers in high schools and middle schools. From my experiences and talking to others during our evaluations, there is no prominent and universal app that high schools are currently using to promote altruistic opportunities and an easy and free way to grow skills that otherwise students may not have the chance to do so without the visibility of these opportunities.

**Link to interactive prototype:**

[https://invis.io/86PJ40LUDJR#/335971782\\_Screen\\_Shot\\_2018-12-09\\_At\\_8-42-40\\_PM](https://invis.io/86PJ40LUDJR#/335971782_Screen_Shot_2018-12-09_At_8-42-40_PM)

## Application Screens

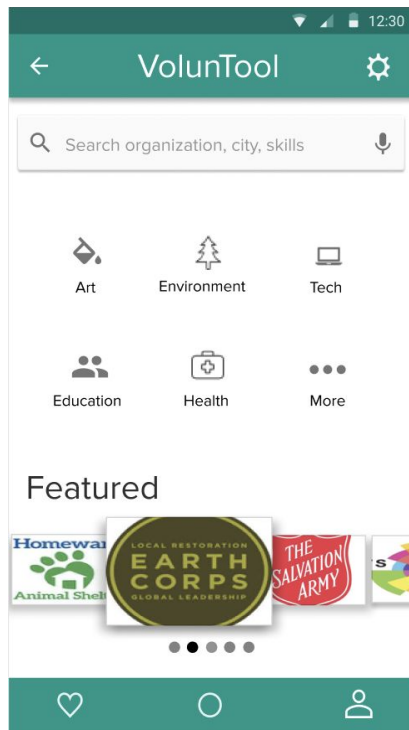


Figure 1: Our homepage is designed in a way that users can start using the app without creating an account. Users can explore opportunities related to their interests or check out featured volunteer opportunities. We designed our main page this way so that users feel unrestricted and inclined to explore around. Users can also search for opportunities or keywords in the search bar and will be returned with a set of results if there are opportunities categorized under those keywords or name.

Figure 1: Landing/Home page

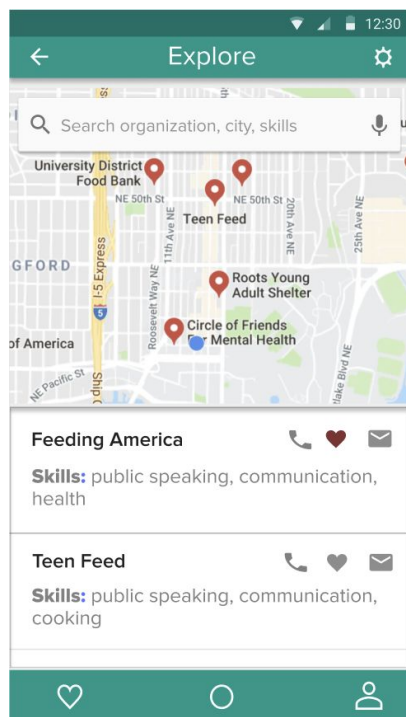


Figure 2: Our Results Page displays a list of results based on the search query and hosts the results on the map. We took this idea from the popularity of the Yelp format, which displays restaurants and their relative locations on a map. We think that this can encourage users to participate more in volunteer opportunities when they can easily find suitable organizations based on location as most high schoolers don't have a car. We also added an email, save, and call icons for each result so that users can contact the organization immediately.

Figure 2: Results page

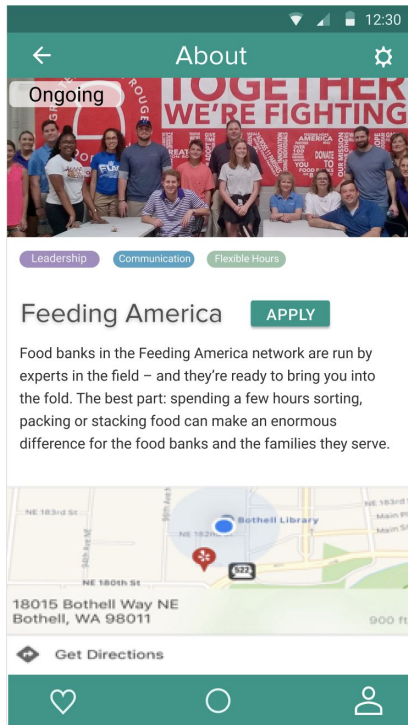


Figure 3: About Screen

Figure 3: This About screen is dedicated to providing our user with information about the organization. It includes tags that represent the skills that the student can develop in this organization as well as the location of the non-profit. If the user is interested in volunteering with the organization, they can click the apply button which will send the user's resume and profile information to the organization.

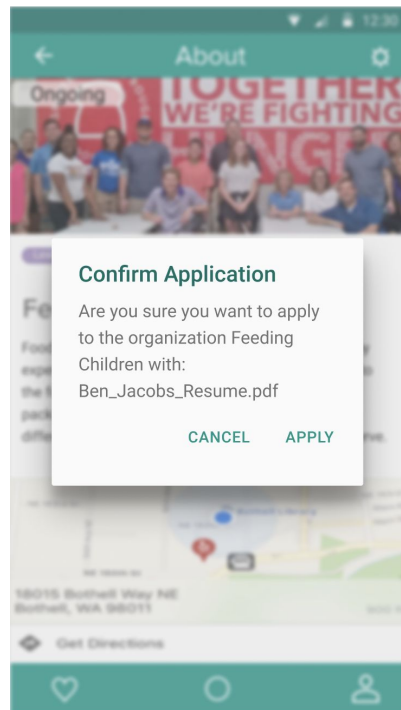
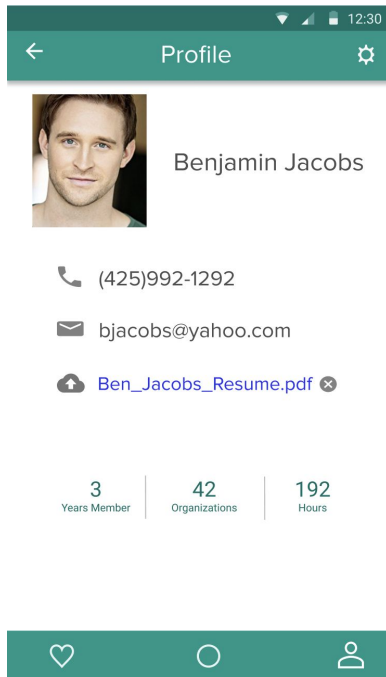


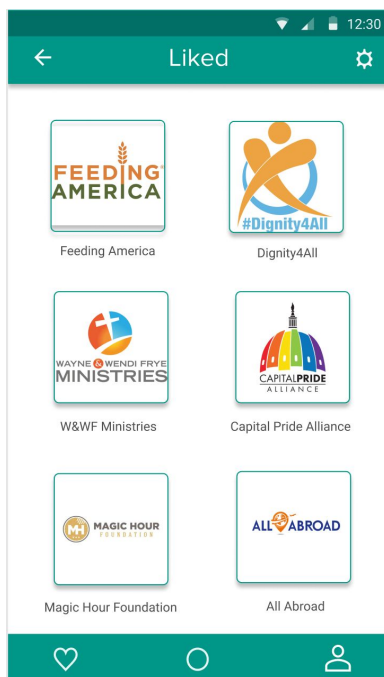
Figure 4: Confirmation screen

Figure 4: After the user chooses to apply to the organization, this confirmation popup overlays on the About page. This serves as a pre-step before sending the user's uploaded resume and the user's profile to the organization.



*Figure 5:* The main goal of the Profile page is to let the user view their details and delete their resume if they desire. This section of the app includes how long that user has been a member of our app, the number of organizations they have worked with and the total hours they have logged through our platform. We intend that the organizations can see the profile information on their end so the higher the numbers on their profile page, the more credible the student will appear.

*Figure 5: Profile screen*



*Figure 6:* This is the page that contains the user's saved volunteer organizations from the Results page as shown in figure 2. Users can save an organization by clicking on the heart-shaped like button in the results page and then come to this page to see a grid of all their saved organizations. Clicking on any one of these buttons on this page will take the user to the About page as seen in Figure 3 for that non-profit listing.

*Figure 6: Favorites page*

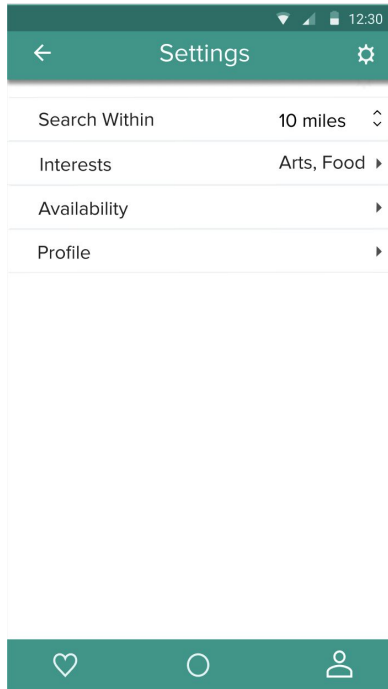


Figure 7: Settings Page

Figure 7: This is the settings page. Here, the user can set and edit various preferences. First, they can specify their search radius for volunteer opportunities so that all their search results are within a certain area of their location. Next, they can list interests for VolunTool to tailor recommendations accordingly. The user can set availability and also edit their information from their Profile page in figure 5. This allows VolunTool to suggest organizations with similar availability and automatically book appointments.

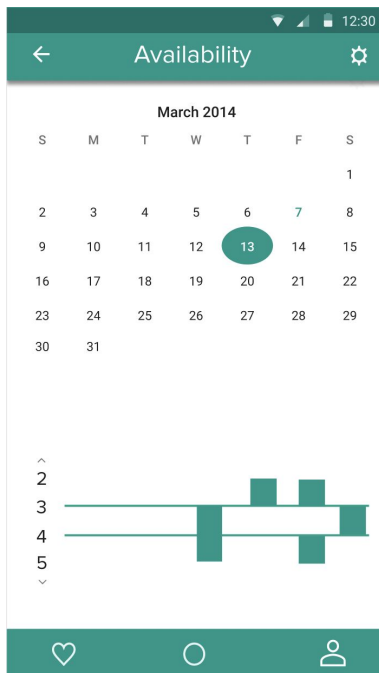


Figure 8: Edit Availability page

Figure 8: This is a view of the Availability page. Here, the user can set their available times so that organizations can see if it that would be suitable for their needs.



## Evaluation

We performed usability tests to evaluate the efficiency of our prototypes by testing our designs on few students that attend high schools near the area. We selected schools from different districts and areas with varying socioeconomic statuses.

The first student we interviewed is a freshman at Woodinville High School and is heavily involved in the community. She also participates in many volunteer activities. Upon asking her how they go about performing tasks for the society and volunteering, we found that she had to send blind emails to people in numerous non-profit organizations and hope for a response back. This process takes a significant amount of time for these organizations to respond back because they are typically backlogged with other tasks and priorities to meet their annual goals.

After, we showed her our app and observed how the participant navigated our screens, we asked for general feedback on the usability and efficiency of the app. Upon which, we were told that the app seamlessly provided her with enough information about the organization to give her an idea on whether she wanted to pursue an opportunity with the non-profit. She suggested that she would really benefit from some sort of feature where she can apply directly and instantly on our platform rather than being directed to email and phone.

We also interviewed a high school sophomore from Eastgate High School who does not participate much in extra-curricular except National Honor Society and ran a usability test with him. A few things that he suggested didn't work well was the profile page because it seemed very empty with lots of white space. The navigation seemed to clunky and old-fashioned and could be improved with a simple transition to a hamburger menu instead of bars at the bottom. We also wanted to know if users would prefer creating a login when entering our app for the first time. It turns out that our representative users preferred to just start exploring volunteer opportunities rather than creating an account.

## Limitations

### *User base*

Given this scope and our target user, our design does not account for organizations that want to be visible in our platform. In other words, currently, they cannot add themselves to our platform and there's also no way for us to vet these new and interested organizations. Our decision to overpass including functionalities from non-profits is to make sure that we have well-defined features for our primary user group, who are students. For a specific example, our design doesn't allow organizations to specify the number of open and occupied volunteer positions they have available. In order to find out or schedule a volunteering appointment, students have to contact the organization, which can be an annoying and time-consuming process.

### *Smartphone*

Since our platform is an app that is designed for the smartphone, an assumption that we made as designers is that our user base, which is mainly comprised of high school students, has a smartphone. We currently do not have an option for a web application, but this could be a topic of discussion in the future.

### *Accessibility*

Another area of focus that we do not address is accessibility. Accessibility is something we aspire to delve into but are not able to for the lack of time for this project. For example, we currently have an option to take voice input for the search bar but our app makes the assumption that users can visibly navigate through an app.

### *Setting Locations*

In addition, students aren't able to set a "home" location. Our app searches for volunteering opportunities in a radius around the user and uses their current location. It would be helpful if students can look at the volunteering organizations around their house or their school.

### *Data Transfer*

Lastly, schools often mandate student volunteering because they see the benefits it provides to growing children. As such, they often have their own lists of recommended volunteering locations and times as well as partnerships with these locations. Our app doesn't provide a portal for schools to incorporate their volunteering databases and connections into the mobile experience.

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