

ACQUAINT

Training and Guidelines

Volunteer Handbook

2024

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Introduction

What is Acquaint?

Acquaint is a platform where you can volunteer to help build a more inclusive and peaceful global community through effortful intercultural dialogue. Worldwide volunteers connect for one-on-one conversations to share culture, perspectives, and life experiences. Starting with each Acquainter, this type of volunteerism creates a ripple effect in communities that reduces prejudice, increases empathy, and builds our capacity to collaborate across diverse cultural backgrounds.



According to UNESCO, “Improved communication is the first step towards enhancing interculturalism within diverse societies and laying the foundation for peaceful societies, without which progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals cannot be achieved.” In other words, humanity will be unable to address the world’s greatest challenges, such as poverty and hunger, unless we become better intercultural communicators.

The practice we achieve through Acquaint, such as active listening and tolerance, are the same qualities required for working together to tackle some of the world's most significant problems. Learning from others across cultures and generations has a powerful effect of fostering empathy. These experiences can also increase our chances of success personally and professional by strengthening critical communication skills. Thus, intercultural dialogue is healthy for us, our communities, and our world.

Our Vision

Acquaint envisions a world where our differences no longer hinder our ability to collaborate. We hope to see as many people as possible volunteering to develop collaborative skills and intercultural understanding.



How it Works

Volunteers connect via <https://www.acquaint.org/>, Acquaint's website. This handbook will describe in detail the technical requirements, the guidelines, and expectations of volunteers. Because Acquaint is a volunteer opportunity, everyone on the platform shares the responsibility to engage in impactful, mutually respectful dialogue.

Mission, Vision, and Values of Acquaint



Mission

To provide a platform where anyone can develop collaborative skills and intercultural understanding



Vision

A world where our differences no longer hinder our ability to collaborate



Values

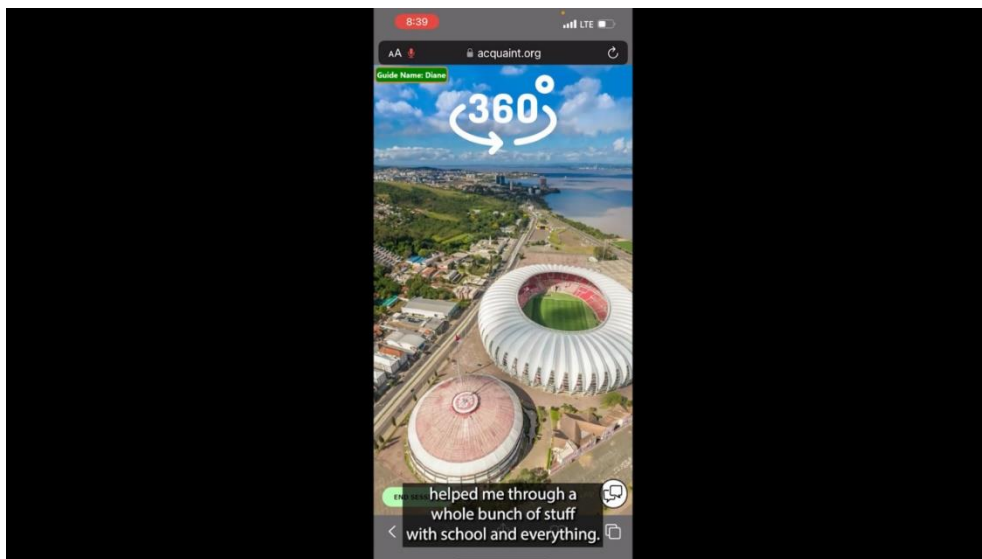
1. *Listening*
2. *Appreciation*
3. *Curiosity*
4. *Equality*
5. *Non-judgement*

Connecting on Acquaint

Starting conversations, especially across different cultures, can be difficult and doesn't come naturally for everyone. Therefore, Acquaint has designed its platform to make dialogue easier and more impactful.

What does the experience look like?

- Set weekly availability to connect for sessions on your time.
- Time commitment is flexible. You may volunteer weekly, monthly, or whatever works best for your schedule.
- Sessions are typically scheduled at least 24 hours in advance.
- Virtual experiences serve as icebreakers. These include panoramic images and scripts about various locations and subject matters.
- Volunteers speak with each other one-on-one via an audio connection while viewing the icebreakers together.
- No video is included – volunteers cannot see each other's faces.



Kingsley and Diane chat with one another while viewing a virtual location and answering icebreaker questions

Mentoring for New Volunteers

If you are a new volunteer, do not worry if you don't understand everything in this handbook. Acquaint's mentors and team members will be there to help you!

Who are Acquaint's Mentors?

Acquaint's mentors are experienced volunteers who welcome and train new volunteers to use the Acquaint platform. They are passionate about Acquaint's mission and eager to share their passion and knowledge.

What do Volunteers learn from Mentors?

- How to use the Acquaint platform once connected
- Suggestions for active listening and communication
- How to troubleshoot technical issues
- Acquaint's rules and guidelines for volunteers

How do I schedule a Mentoring Session?

Once you have attended an onboarding session and/or completed the open-book quiz based on this handbook, you will enter 5+ available time slots to be paired mentor (see next page).



Can I be a Mentor?

To become a mentor, you must accrue at least 20 hours of experience in sessions on the platform. If you are interested in being a mentor, let us know! We may also invite you.

Steps for Scheduling on Acquaint

1. Sign up with an account on www.acquaint.org/sign_up_today.
2. Check your email inbox and click on the verification link provided.
3. On www.acquaint.org, choose "Set Availability." **Reserve at least 45 minutes for your session.** An average session is 45-60 minutes.

ACQUAINT
Done Editing
Set Your Availability
Your Timezone: America/Los_Angeles
Please select at least 2 timeslots *per week* in order to be paired.
AM/PM
Previous Day Next Day

2024-06-27	Fri 2024-06-28	Sat 2024-06-29	Sun 2024-06-30	Mon 2024-07-01	Tue 2024-07-02	Wed 2024-07-03	Thu 2024-07-04
6:00 (Moon)	5:00 (Moon)		6:00 (Moon)	5:00 (Moon)	6:00 (Moon)	6:00 (Moon)	6:00 (Moon)
8:00 (Sun)	7:00 (Sun)		8:00 (Sun)	7:00 (Sun)	8:00 (Sun)	8:00 (Sun)	8:00 (Sun)
12:00 (Sun)	9:00 (Sun)		10:00 (Sun)	9:00 (Sun)	10:00 (Sun)	10:00 (Sun)	12:00 (Sun)
14:00 (Sun)	11:00 (Sun)		12:00 (Sun)	11:00 (Sun)	14:00 (Sun)	12:00 (Sun)	14:00 (Sun)
16:00 (Sun)	13:00 (Sun)		14:00 (Sun)	13:00 (Sun)	16:00 (Sun)	14:00 (Sun)	16:00 (Sun)
18:00 (Sun)			16:00 (Sun)	17:00 (Sun)	18:00 (Sun)	16:00 (Sun)	18:00 (Sun)
20:00 (Sun)	19:00 (Sun)		18:00 (Sun)	19:00 (Sun)	20:00 (Sun)		20:00 (Sun)
	21:00 (Sun)			21:00 (Sun)			

Done Editing

4. Click to select time slots when you are available. **New volunteers must enter at least five time slots** to be paired with a mentor.
 - a. Note: this does not mean that you will volunteer for every time slot you enter. It just means that Acquaint will pair you with a fellow volunteer/mentor for at least one of the times. You can also specify in your profile the maximum number of sessions you can do per week.

5. When Acquaint pairs you for a session based on your availability, you will receive an email with either the subject line “Acquaint Session Scheduled” or “Assigned to Session.”

The Two Volunteer Roles: Guide and Traveler

Whenever two volunteers connect on Acquaint, each person fills a slightly different role. The two roles are as follows:

- *The Guide:* This person has more buttons available to click during the session, **optionally** switching between the photographs and reading the icebreaker scripts and fun facts. There is no expectation that the Guide will read the scripts, nor is there any expectation that the Guide will have knowledge of the subject matter. The purpose of Acquaint’s virtual experiences is to encourage positive conversation, not to educate volunteers about specific topics. In fact, many volunteers choose to skip the icebreakers entirely.
- *The Traveler:* At the start of a session, this person chooses from a list of Acquaint’s virtual experiences. Once connected with the Guide, the Traveler does not have to click any buttons or read anything. However, they are equally responsible for making conversation and actively listening. The name “Traveler” comes from the fact that many of our virtual icebreakers feature different destinations around the world.

As a volunteer, you will learn to fill both roles. For some sessions, you will be the Traveler, and for others, you will be the Guide. No matter your role, it is essential to listen, share, and do your best to connect with your session partner.

Requirements for Connecting

- Internet connection
- Any of the following devices:
 - Tablets
 - Laptops
 - Desktops
 - Smartphones



- Your device must have a microphone. Generally, a device that works for Zoom or other video chat apps will work for Acquaint.
- Conversational English (current limitation): Your English doesn't need to be perfect, but you must be able to carry a conversation in English. Many volunteers on Acquaint are practicing their English.
- A compatible browser. Opera is not supported. iOS devices should use the Safari browser. On all other devices, Firefox or Chrome will work.

Step-by-step: Connecting for a Session

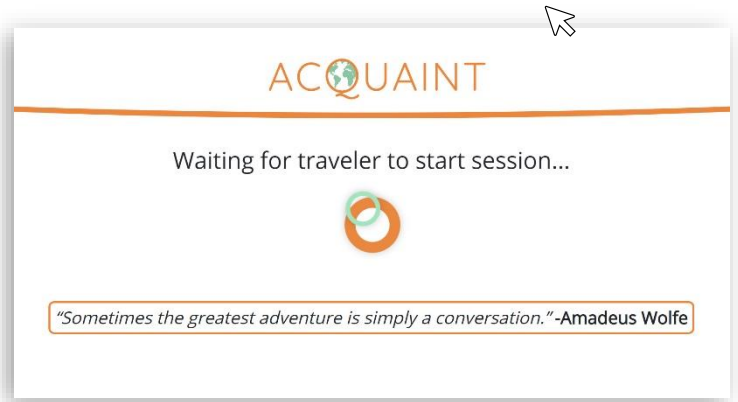
1. **Confirm.** When you receive an email that you have been scheduled for a session, click "Confirm" in the email. **The session is still scheduled whether you click "confirm" or not.** If you need to cancel, use the "Cancel" button on the website to message our team.
2. **Check-in.** 15 – 60 minutes before your session's start time, go to acquaint.org and click "Check-in." Checking in informs the Acquaint team that you have remembered your session and will show up on time.

3. **Join Your Session.** Complete the device test and begin your session. **Volunteers more than 5 minutes late may be replaced for the session.** The Traveler selects an icebreaker from the list.

Traveler view – Select experience



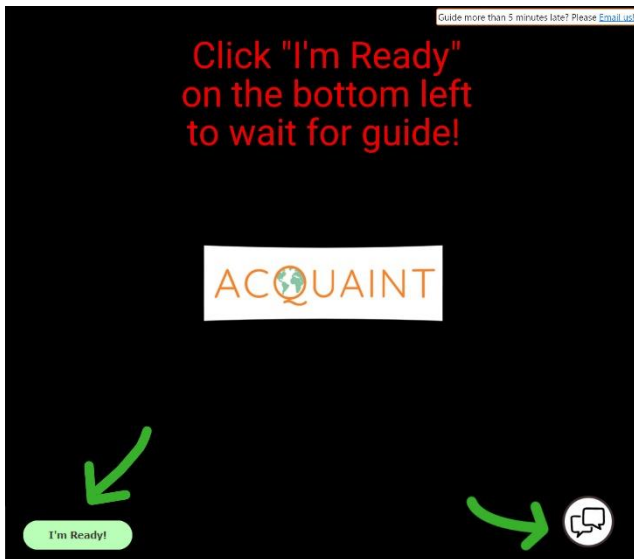
Guide view – Join session



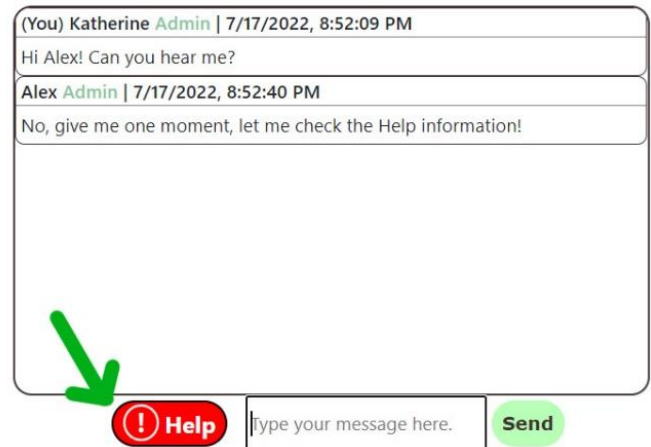
4. **Follow prompts and use Chat if needed.** Enable microphone access when prompted. The Traveler clicks “I’m ready” and waits for the Guide to greet them. You can use the chat to assist in communication. Use the **“Help”** and **“Raise Hand”** buttons to request assistance.

Acquaint Chat (Beta)

Please use this chat when you need to coordinate with your session partner (e.g., audio difficulties). Acquaint admin/facilitators may join or read this chat to offer/provide additional support.



Traveler view – Launch session & open chat



Chat window + “Help”/“Raise Hand” button

5. Guide connects audio. Once the Guide joins the session, they click the green “Connect Audio” button. From here, both volunteers should be able to hear each other and can begin talking.

6. Guide optionally controls images and reads scripts. The Guide will see a series of numbered buttons. Clicking on each button will load a photograph and script for the Guide to read if they want to. The Guide can also click on the image to rotate the panorama for the Traveler. Either person can click “End Session” when finished.

Guide view – Connect Audio, See Scripts and Photos

The screenshot shows the Acquaint interface for a tour titled "Tour: Ancient Ruins of the World". At the top, there is a menu icon and the Acquaint logo. Below the title, there are three buttons: "Connect Audio" (green), "Hangup" (red), and "End Tour" (red). A message indicates the connection state is "Not Attempted". A note explains that "Not Attempted" means the participant lacks microphone access and suggests trying "Hang Up" or refreshing the page. Below this is a "Scene selection:" section with 13 numbered buttons for different locations: 1. Chichen Itza, 2. Moai Statues, 3. Rock of Cashel, 4. Colosseum, 5. Machu Picchu, 6. Tikal National Park, 7. Tikal National Park 2, 8. Ta Prohm Temple, 9. The Bayon Temple, 10. Petra, 11. Volubilis, 12. Guildford Castle, and 13. Ruins of Krzyżtopór. The "Machu Picchu" button is selected. Below the scene selection, there is a "Machu Picchu" section with a paragraph of text and a "Change Traveler Zoom:" button with a "Zoom In" option. At the bottom, there is a large image of Machu Picchu with the text "VISUAL ASSIST ENABLED (Click image to move the traveler's view.)" overlaid.

Punctuality

Acquaint's system requires that volunteers **show up at the exact time of any scheduled sessions** or preferably a few minutes early. If volunteers are more than five minutes late, they may not get to do the session.

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If you miss a session, don't worry too much – we don't take it personally! However, reliable attendance (and letting us know in advance if you need to cancel) greatly helps our team and makes it easier for us to schedule you for more sessions in the future.



“Backup” Volunteers

“Backup” volunteering, also known as “volunteer coverage,” is an optional yet critical volunteer role. It means being willing to take another volunteer’s place for a session if they suddenly need to cancel (often due to internet or power outages). As a backup/coverage volunteer, you show up at the scheduled time but will only know at the last minute whether you will do a session. Backup volunteers allow Acquaint to continue operating, even where power outages and loss of network connection are common. Therefore, **it is one of the most important volunteer roles and the most critical to attend reliably and on time.**

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Once you complete your mentorship training, the website will ask if you would consider being a backup volunteer. If you agree to be a backup volunteer, Acquaint will not assign you to coverage more than once a week (and often less) unless discussed otherwise. Also, the more volunteers agree to be backup, the less frequently any one person will do it because every time slot only needs one backup volunteer. **It truly is an amazing help!**



Technical Difficulties

Just as tolerance for diverse perspectives is critical to Acquaint volunteering, so is tolerance for troubleshooting tech challenges. The strength of Acquaint's community lies in its ability to recruit volunteers from all different locations and walks of life. Some places have stronger internet access than others. While volunteering does require a strong enough network to maintain steady audio, Acquaint understands that disconnections and technical difficulties are inevitable. Therefore, demonstrating patience and understanding of these challenges is essential to volunteering. When audio disconnections occur, troubleshoot issues using the **"Help" button**. Also, use the chat window to communicate with your session partner.

Accents and Dialects



When communicating with fellow volunteers on Acquaint, you will hear accents and dialects different from yours. Another challenge of the volunteer role is conversing across accent barriers. Some strategies include:

- Ask the other person to slow down, or try slowing your own speech if you suspect they don't understand you.
- Ask them to phrase what they've said differently, or use another word.
- Close your eyes while listening to remove visual distractions.
- Use the chat window to communicate words or phrases you have trouble understanding.

Together, we make an effort to work across all communication barriers!

Code of Conduct

Acquaint relies on volunteers to uphold specific standards and rules to keep the platform safe, welcoming, and positive. These guidelines outline the code of conduct expected of volunteers.

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1. **Appreciation.** This is one of Acquaint's core values. We ask every volunteer to appreciate their session partner for showing up and teaching them something new. Appreciation looks different for everyone. It may involve thanking them silently or aloud, sharing something new you learned from them, or expressing how they made a positive difference in your day. We must appreciate ourselves and others for taking the time to do so. Recently, we added a feature where volunteers can share "appreciation notes" with each other.
2. **No exchange of contact information or PII.** Volunteers must not share full names, numbers, email, social media, or other contact information for any app or device. Volunteers are encouraged to share their country, state, or city. However, they must not share their home address.
3. **Topics of conversation.** Our goal in dialogue is to learn. There are few restrictions on conversation topics, but we must try to be curious and tolerant. Starting with lighter topics is often easier. It is best to be cautious with potentially controversial topics and consider asking your session partner if they are okay with discussing a more serious subject matter. Examples include religion, politics, war, and deeply held values. If you or your session partner start to feel angry or upset, changing the subject is a good approach.
4. **Attention and quiet surroundings.** Since one of the main goals as a volunteer is to listen and give your session partner your full attention, please try to remove distractions. Ensure your environment is quiet because noisy surroundings can make it difficult for your session partner to hear you.
5. **Abuse.** Acquaint does not tolerate hate, prejudice, harassment, personal attacks, or any other form of abuse on the platform. If you encounter abuse, end the session and immediately report your encounter

to support@acquaint.org. Reporting abuse allows Acquaint to remove harmful behavior from our community, thus protecting other volunteers.

6. **Ulterior Motives.** Acquaint strictly prohibits volunteering for purposes outside of the stated mission. It is not a platform for activities including but not limited to soliciting, promoting one's business or oneself, forming romantic relationships, requesting money, pushing political or religious ideologies, or selling goods and services. The "no sharing contact info" rule reduces the risk of many such ulterior motives.
7. **Beliefs:** Acquaint is an opportunity to share and learn about people and cultures. It is **not** an opportunity to convince others of our beliefs. If someone says something you dislike or disagree with, do not challenge or try to "convert" them. You can simply listen, ask questions, and learn. However, if you believe something they said constitutes abuse (see #5), report it to support@acquaint.org.
8. **Punctuality and reliability.** Do your best to show up on time for all sessions because your session partner will be waiting to connect with you. If a volunteer is more than five minutes late, they may be replaced for the session since we don't want to keep anyone waiting for very long.
9. **Diverse personalities.** Sometimes, conversations can feel more challenging if volunteers' personalities or styles of communication seem to lack chemistry. Although these sessions may feel less comfortable, they are an opportunity to work through the discomfort and learn from each other. We recommend reading this article: [The Learning Zone Model](#).
10. **Feedback.** We recognize that the directness of feedback or constructive criticism varies across cultures. However, with Acquaint, direct feedback is essential both between volunteers and with the Acquaint staff. If someone says or does something that bothers you, try to let them know clearly and respectfully. The Acquaint staff often shares feedback with volunteers that is both positive and constructive. Similarly, volunteers are encouraged to share suggestions for improvement and feedback with our staff.

Tips to Avoid Missing Sessions

Volunteers can take several measures to ensure they do not miss their sessions. Some suggestions are:

1. Check your email every day. Acquaint sends an automatic email out to volunteers whenever their sessions are scheduled.
2. Make sure Acquaint emails are not going to your spam or promotions.
3. Check acquaint.org every day. All your upcoming sessions are listed on the home page.
4. Set reminders. Acquaint's emails include an "add to calendar option," which many volunteers find helpful. We also recommend written reminders, phone reminders, or anything that works best for you.
5. Download [WhatsApp](#) if you don't have it already (recommended). We use it to send reminders for your upcoming sessions.
6. If you have any questions or concerns, reach out to support@acquaint.org.

Conclusion

Acquaint's goal is to inspire as many people as possible to build their intercultural collaboration skills, all while helping strengthen the global community. These connections will result in increased understanding throughout the world between people from all walks of life and a reduction in prejudice, conflict, and violence. Each volunteer gets out what they put in, and if everyone puts in effort, kindness, and tolerance, they serve as role models within their communities. Acquaint is deeply grateful for the time and commitment of the volunteers who make everything possible!

For Parents and Volunteers Under 18

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If you are considering volunteering and you are under 18, please share this page with your parent or guardian. Or better yet, recruit your parent or guardian to volunteer as well! As a reminder, you must be at least 15 years old to volunteer.

If an Acquaint volunteer follows all the rules and guidelines of the platform, especially the rule of not sharing contact information, the safety risks are minimal. However, there are other risks when engaging in conversation with new people. If your child is a volunteer, they may:

- Encounter beliefs and perspectives drastically different from yours, some of which you may even find offensive
- Hear stories that you may find troubling or traumatic
- Undergo changes in perspective that affect their views of the world

Of course, there is no better way to understand the Acquaint experience than by trying it yourself. It's great when parents can join their children and become Acquaint volunteers as well! To sign up, visit <https://www.acquaint.org/opportunities>.

