

History of Be Volunteer

From Hospitality Club to HCvol (2000 - 2006)

The history of BeVolunteer is a long and winding road through the wonderful world of hospitality exchange. Started by a group of volunteers from Hospitality Club, the organisation later takes on members of Couchsurfing and Servas, as well as other volunteers for whom BeWelcome is their first hospitality exchange network.

July 2000

Together with his brother Kjell, Veit Kuehne, inspired by other hospitality exchange networks such as SERVAS and SIGHT founds the Hospitality Club (HC).

2002 till 2005

The later founders of the future "HCvol"/"BeVolunteer" start volunteering for HC, covering all areas of HC volunteering from programming, spam checking, accepting members, geo adjustment, forum moderation, translation to support for HC members.

2005

Several core volunteers from HC start to question the owner of HC about processes and systems. Important issues raised by volunteers include:

- the absence of any legal status of HC
- the absence of any democratic system for decision making
- the absence of any transparency in the management of finances
- the lack of transparency of HC policies for users of the website
- volunteers feeling manipulated

These shortcomings seem particularly problematic to the founders of HCvol, because HC is not a start-up anymore but a real project that is growing rapidly. Concerned volunteers feel a responsibility to work on these issues so that HC can evolve and, with some time and effort, be implemented in HC over time to create a more democratic foundation for further growth. The concerned volunteers feel that work is needed on these issues, so as to address the problems that HC is beginning to face.

However, Veit retains a lot of personal control. He refuses to debate and chooses neither to involve nor to inform even the most committed volunteers on these issues.

December 2005

After many attempts to push the above issues in personal conversations with the HC founder, a more concerted action by HC volunteers occurs during December 2005, when a "manifest" is sent to the owner of HC requesting him to work with the volunteers on the issues, or they would stop all

their volunteer work for HC. Regardless of that threat these volunteers still are in love with the HC project, and never stop working. However, their motivation is decreasing.

2006

February 2006

Finally after 2 months of silence, Veit discloses his position: No way he will accept that manifest. It is clear for him: Never will HC offer transparency about money management, never will HC be managed by a democratic structure, and for the legal status he suggests a company status or even worse, something based in the shady tax heaven St Kitts & Nevis.

February 25th, 2006

A meeting in Dresden is arranged for February 25th to discuss the problems and to find a new way of restructuring HC volunteer teams and reworking procedures. Only HC core volunteers are invited. Many attend, with some traveling more than 1000 km to help solve the ever growing problems in HC and to address the lack of motivation after the manifest was turned down. Two future HCvol founders, Matthias and Marco, take part in the meeting. Two and a half days of heated debate reveal that there is no room for compromise from Veit's side, as he does not give in on any topic. At the end of the meeting, Veit finally accepts to consider an external audit of the finances. He sets up a board of 5 people chosen by him, over which he will keep a veto right, to make strategic decisions. The board is explicitly not empowered to discuss finances or the possibilities of creating a new legal structure. Anything discussed on the board has to be kept confidential. He considers establishing a legal team to work on defining what would be the best statutes for HC and he talks about creating a page explaining his point of view on HC policy.

For some of the concerned volunteers this is not enough, and is unacceptable basis to solve the issues. For others it is movement in the right direction. Despite the various reactions, none of the proposals and good intentions are implemented. The five person board has 1-2 Skype conferences where nothing is achieved. After six months, the board is officially dissolved. Two future HCvol founders, Pierre-Charles and Marco, has been members of that board.

But there is still the hope that HC can evolve to become the organization that is worth its incredible members.

March till April 2006

A group of highly involved HC volunteers decides to set up HCvol, in order to build a space of communication for volunteers, independent from the owner's control, as they felt he prevents communication between volunteers. This makes it very difficult to discuss his decisions, and whether they are good or bad for the HC project. The founders of HCvol consider it unacceptable that Veit has blocked many issues for so long, despite whole teams disagreeing with his vision.

Is HC Veit's thing?

The fundamental motivation behind the creation of HCvol is to answer the question of whether HC belongs to Veit. The obvious conclusion was that HC shall belong to the volunteers it is felt that

ownership, if not the members. Consequently it is felt that HC shall be governed by a legal non-profit organization composed of those who has built HC. It was felt that the outcome of the current structure means one founder benefited from volunteer labour. Suggestions are made to rebuild trust between the founder and the volunteer base, and create a structure that adds legal protection against HC going for-profit.

July 2006

HCvol proposes a new transparent and democratic organization to Veit. These proposals are rejected. HCvol founders are threatened with being kicked out from HC, as it is alleged that their only aim is to gain personal power.

September 2006

It is felt by many in HCvol that an alternative has to be built. Through word of mouth, new volunteers have found their way to HCvol and start to use the forum extensively for all kinds of discussions.

October 2006

In October 2006, HCvol becomes an official organisation, committed to democracy and transparency. A group of nine volunteers (claudiaab, coroa, gotte, hkroger, jeanyves, junglerover, matthias, pietshah and thorgal67) works hard to set up HCvol as an organization. Eight of them constitute the first Board of Directors (BoD), whose role it is to meet weekly in order to take any needed decisions, to organize HCvol so that volunteers can work well, and to make sure no abuse takes place. As soon as HCvol will be a larger group of volunteers, there will be a General Assembly and a BoD will be elected by HCvol members. The statutes are similar those of the European association Hospitality Club. The European association Hospitality Club was founded in December 2004 and was a basis for the organisation of the hospitality exchange camp in Monnai, which took place in July 2005.

In the middle of the month, there is a last big hesitation. Isn't the whole project a huge waste? Isn't there any way to work on a really new project with HCvol, but including HC members? The BoD suggested to Veit that HCvol develop a project on a new website using the pre-existing HC database. In return, the HCvol members will maintain the HC site for a limited period of time. The HCvol site will have acted like a test site which HC members could use. Veit refuses any idea of sharing the database.

November 2006

Core volunteers meet in Heidelberg, Germany to discuss Travelbook, the source code that will serve as basis for the first BW blog, gallery and forum.

BeVolunteer and its project BeWelcome (2007 till open end)

January 2007

HCvol is renamed to BeVolunteer (www.bevolunteer.org), the non-profit organization dedicated to its new project, BeWelcome. The former HCvol website is still in use, but now called BeVolunteer. The website is used to organise the volunteering around the project BeWelcome. The main tools are the wiki and a discussion forum. The majority of the topics touching the creation of that new platform are discussed among volunteers, decisions are taken and all the teams and routines are set.

February 2007

The project BeWelcome is launched in a beta phase and the first members start signing up.

May 2007

The first General Assembly, is held in Brussels/Belgium, after online preparation. On May 5th, 24 volunteers approve the new statutes of BeVolunteer as a French association under the law of 1901. Volunteers enjoy hospitality and developing the BeWelcome project. May 17, 2007 the statutes of the association are registered at the prefecture of Rennes/France.

June 2007

The website Open Couchsurfing is started. Similar to HCvol the idea is to have a platform for discussions and to initiate a change within the organisation running CS. Main reasons for the platform are the non-disclosure agreement (NDA) which all CS volunteers have to sign, but also that the code is not released with open source licence and some problems within the organisational structure of CS. The NDA contains a non-compete clause instead of only asking for a license on the work produced by volunteers. But all these efforts don't lead to any result and in 2012 the site will be archived. Some of the founders of Open Couchsurfing and also people taking part in the discussions later on join BeWelcome and BeVolunteer. So from early on BeVolunteer is a mixture of former HC and CS volunteers.

August 2007

Olivier from Marseille, France, joins BeWelcome as our 1,000th member

October 2007

BeWelcome has become the first non-profit travel/hospitality website based entirely on open source software.

An interview with Claudia from the BoD in October 2007

An interview with Frank from the BoD in October 2007

December 2007

A new version of BeWelcome is online. The forum and search pages show major improvements.

2008

January 2008

The 1st BeWelcome Volunteer UnConference is held in Antwerp, Belgium.

28 members from 6 countries attend, including members of the BoD as well as old and new volunteers. Workshops are organised and friendships are made. It is noted during the event that membership surpassed 2400 members.

Autumn 2008

BeWelcome gets a redesigned startup page and a guided tour for newcomers. Interview with Felix

2009

February 2009

In France one of the first guidebooks dedicated to Hospitality Exchange is published. It is called "VOYAGER presque GRATUIT" and contains a couple of pages about BeWelcome. One BeVolunteer member, thorgal67, even contributed a funny article about stereotypical Hospex Travelers.

March 2009

BeWelcome is available in 29 languages and 50% of the site is translated to Esperanto.

Volunteer Cafés (virtual chat conferences) become a major tool for BW member empowerment.

June 2009

The website gets a new look. Community news are introduced, so now the people making the project possible can inform the community about the ongoings behind the scenes. The community news are some kind of blog.

July 2009

The 3rd General Assembly is held in Grimbergen (near Brussels), Belgium.

Groups are introduced on BW which boosts the forum participation.

2010

January 2010

During early 2010, BW struggles with really low volunteer activity with doubt over the medium to long term future of the project. Couchsurfing had launched as a non-profit, with most active volunteers in the hospitality exchange scene preferring to volunteer for Couchsurfing. A call from the BoD for donations and for volunteer contributions has some success and shows that a role for BW still exists in January 2010. Member tgoorden organises another Unconference in Antwerp,

Belgium. BeWelcome offers its members the possibility of creating wiki pages. A BeWelcome Shop is also set up.

February 2010

A collaboration between Servas and BeWelcome is explored. Whilst several meetings are organised, a September meeting sees coordinators from both sides seeking a compromise on how to work together, given Servas was a paper based hospitality system and BW an online one. Unfortunately, the cooperation never becomes a reality.

June 2010

The 4th General Assembly is held in Rennes, France, where Bevolunteer is registered.

2011

January 2011

Another meet-up for BW volunteers in Antwerp, Belgium.

September 2011

An interview with the Executive (Thomas Goorden), is produced and published.

October 2011

The forum and the wiki of the BeVolunteer website move to the BeWelcome website. Volunteering could then be organised within bewelcome.org platform by using the groups and the wiki. bevolunteer.org now forwards to the BW website and is not longer in use.

November 2011

The 5th General Assembly is held in Grimbergen, Belgium.

2012

May 2012

Seek the Duck is a BW event in Toulouse, people from all around France and even from other countries gather in Toulouse for 5 days. A lot of common activities are organised like wine tasting, picnics, hiking and much more.

September - October 2012

The 6th General Assembly is held in two parts: one online and another real-life meeting in Halle/Saale (Germany). The BoD receives a mandate to launch a yearly donation campaign to support selected BeWelcome activities; it is invented to support local activities. This campaign (and the subsequent distribution of the collected money) is called "Be Active". The first BeActive campaign has been budgeted with a value of 500 Euro.

December 2012

BeWelcome releases a major update to the website, dropping Google Maps as default map provider in favor of free and open source OpenStreetMap. The 30.000th member joins BW.

2013

March 2013

There are 50 BV members, consisting of about 50% original members and 50% new members. In the past most of them came from Europe, but that is rapidly changing. Pablobd for example is from Argentina and works on the BoD and is translation coordinator. Another new member is jsfan, located in Australia and very active as both a developer and a forum moderator.

The wordpress site on bevolunteer.org goes live. The site gives information about the association BeVolunteer. While discussions around BeVolunteer still happen on bewelcome.org this site is here to explain the association to people who are new to the project.

At the request of BW members the tradition of Unconferences is picked up again. guaka hosts the first Brussels unconference and important decisions are taken to improve the forum and groups and to introduce a decision making system. Besides a focus of the unconference is also on coding, especially on the new planned code base called Welen.

As of March 2013 BeWelcome is the 3rd largest hospitality exchange community with more than 35,000 members and a website that is, with varying degrees of translation, available in over 40 languages.

April 2013

Bamberg unconference: It was mainly discussed how to introduce the New Members BeWelcome Team.

May 2013

The activity feature is added to the website. Now there is a special tool to organise activities, meetings and events. People can sign up for activities and there is an overview of all activities, even including a map.

June 2013

After long discussions about the structure of forum and groups, a new layout is introduced to the website. "Discussions" unite both groups and forum. On one page it's possible to see all activities in my groups and in the forum, so the discussion page is some sort of newsfeed.

July 2013

The BW decision making process undergoes a lot of changes. A new suggestion system is launched, and has a very visible presence on the website. A new suggestion team takes care of the process. The aim is to get BW members more involved in decision making and to shorten forum discussions, so as to make better and quicker decisions. The first version of this suggestion system was fully

launched in October. The website also gains a new "Safety" button on the menu bar to make it easier for members to report safety issues. Now there is direct link to the safety team.

October 2013

BeWelcome welcomes its 50.000th member. The New Member BeWelcome Team starts working. Members of this team send a greeting message to every new member signing up for BeWelcome. The members of the NMBW team are available for questions of the new members. Florence unconference: Topics are mainly the low activity on the website (e.g. in the groups) and improvements to the hosting experience; for example by introducing a hosting request and a reply rate.

October - November 2013

The 7th General Assembly is held in two parts: one online and another real-life meeting in Fuerth (Germany). It's a big GA with big hopes. 12 members take part in the GA in Fuerth, besides that another 18 members follow the GA online. In the end a BoD of 7 members is elected, for 5 of them it's the first time in the BoD. 2 years earlier Couchsurfing had turned from a non-profit corporation into a for-profit company. Already a lot of CS members made a profile on BW. So during the GA there are discussions on how to be prepared for even bigger influx of CS members. The budget gets adapted to have more money for potentially needed extra servers.

December 2013

Donations for BeVolunteer/ BeWelcome can now be made with Bitcoin as well. To enable Bitcoin donations the vice-treasurer creates an account with Bitpay. Now members can donate by money transfer, Paypal, credit card and by Bitpay. A hackathon takes place in Lisbon, Portugal. Developers and designers meet to work on the website, mainly on the new platform for the codebase called Welen. planetcruiser takes a break from BoD work and later on steps back.

2014

January - March 2014

2014 does not start well for BeVolunteer and BeWelcome: Already in November there was a first minor conflict, when the BoD discussed the positions of Executive and Vice-Executive, because 2 members were running for the position of Executive. The conflicts in January are mainly about communication within the BoD and between BoD and teams, especially about the way of working of the development team.

The Development Team is struggling with two enormous tasks at the same time: Developing a completely new software (Welen) and maintaining the complicated older software that our BeWelcome site currently runs on (Rox). While there is only one development team and one design team, those teams work on 2 different projects. Rox, the current codebase for BW, and Welen, which is supposed to be the future codebase of BeWelcome. So inofficially there is a new team structure with coders and designers working on Rox and designers and coders working on Welen. Communication between BoD, Rox-team and Welen-team is difficult.

So the big conflict within BoD and the Rox and Welen teams is mainly about different ideas and concepts and the way of communicating about this. It seems impossible to get back to a normal way of communication. Additionally, the Welen team is disappointed about the results of the hackathon and the resignation of 3 BoD members, that were supporters of the new codebase.

Some BoD and some BV members start a call for an extraordinary GA (eGA). At the same time the conflicts within the BoD about communication styles, strategy and volunteer resources lead to the resignation of most BoD members.

An eGA is called to address these problems. The eGA is held online only and in 2 separate meetings, one in February and one in March. When the eGA starts the BoD consists only of 2 members, the former secretary and the former treasurer.. A lot of BV members, who have been inactive in the past come back and take part in the eGA. During the eGA BV has 34 active members, that is around 10 more than normally. They are worried about the future of BV and about the future of BeWelcome. After one week of forum online discussions a chat session is held to clear the air. Among other results, escalation paths for conflicts within BeVolunteer and the BoD are defined, and a consultative member to the BoD is appointed to help resolve the issues within the development team. The reasons why the conflict has started and who was responsible for the conflict could not be cleared (it was too complex) and more importantly, we do not want to blame anyone as mistakes were made on all sides and everybody wanted the best for BeWelcome. In the 2nd session of the eGA in March a new BoD is elected.

The whole Welen team stops working, the project for a new codebase of BW is dead.

April 2014

The Lyon unconference takes place over 3 days. The event for dedicated volunteers discusses issues such as local volunteering, e.g. if there should be new tools for organising local BW meetings.

October - November 2014

The 9th General Assembly is held in two parts during late October and early November. One part is online and another is real-life meeting in Grimbergen (Belgium). After the first day of the GA, current BoD members call on all BV members to run for BoD. The new BoD, consists of 4 members, 3 of whom joined the BoD for the first time. New ideas emerge such as a proposal for a site redesign and improving decision making processes.

December 2014

A review of the suggestion system takes place. After controversial debates several changes to the suggestion system are agreed. Unfortunately these changes will not be implemented. The future of the suggestion system is unclear and right now it's not in use.

2015

January 2015

BeWelcome gets accepted as non-profit by Paypal, leading to reduced paypal fees for incoming donations.

March 2015

One former member of the Welen team and 2 former BoD members found a new hospitality platform called Trustroots.

October - November 2015

The 10th General Assembly is held in two parts: one online and another real-life meeting in Duesseldorf (Germany) in late October/early November. Topics of the GA are mostly about decision making and leadership within the current structures (BeVolunteer, BoD, volunteer teams, BW community) and about team goals or how to better motivate volunteers and keep them motivated. Besides that a new ombudsperson is elected. The new BoD consists of 5 members and 3 members have been already part in the last BoD. So it's the biggest continuity since 2012. The position of volunteer coordinator gets reintroduced and for the first time there is a volunteer recruiter within the BoD.

2016

April 2016

Inspired by the Seek the Duck meeting people in Lyon create another BW event lasting for more than 1 day. Around 20 persons meet and get to know each other in Lyon, the event lasts 3 days.

May 2016

There are 2 applications for the BeActive campaign, from the BW events called Seek the Duck (Toulouse) and Seek the Pig (Lyon). The 500 Euro were collected in 2013. Seek the Duck happens for the 5th (!) time. So this is the most famous BW event. For 3 days and a lot of common activities people gather in Toulouse.

September 2016

The French BW community is really active and creates another event on local level in Marseille, entitled "In Cod We trust".

November 2016

GA in Venice

2017

May 2017

Participants of "In Cod we Trust" agree to meet during the weekend around 1st of May 2017 in Berlin for the celebration of 10th anniversary of BeWelcome.

BeWelcome welcomes its 100.000th member.

June 2017

There are 49 BV members, consisting of about 45% original members and 55% newcomers. In the past most of them came from Europe, but that is changing. Pablobd for example is from Argentina and worked on the BoD and as translation coordinator. Jsfan, located in Australia and was active as both a developer and a forum moderator. Sammiekong from China is active in the BoD and as translation coordinator.