

## Volunteering

Volunteers are an essential resource for nonprofits' existence. The goodwill and dedication of friends and neighbors builds strong, responsive, and sustainable organizations and contributes to community cohesiveness and vitality. If you are interested in partnering with an organization as a volunteer, there is a broad range of volunteer jobs available ... from one day to two years, from one hour a week to forty. Types of positions include serving on a Board of Directors, cleaning, teaching, painting, cooking, writing, special events, design, data entry...just about anything you can think of. So no matter what your interests, skills, and amount of time available, there is probably an organization out there looking for YOU!

There are many benefits of being a volunteer, including:

- **Connection to a cause** – Be a part of something bigger than yourself
- **Professional development** – Add depth to your job skills portfolio
- **Meeting new people** – Make new friends with similar interests

To get the most out of your volunteer experience...

1. **Remember that this is a job, but it's lots of fun too.** Because both you and the organization are investing your time and energy, treat your volunteering with the same respect as you would any other job. The more you put into the experience, the more you're likely to get out of it.
2. **Find an organization that matches your interests.** Decide what neighborhood you want to work in and what causes you are interested in furthering. You can search all of the 501 (c) 3 organizations in the US at [Guidestar.org](http://Guidestar.org). At this site, you can limit your search to specific program areas and locations. Meet with the organization's Volunteer Coordinator and discuss the mission and programs to determine your level of interest in working at that nonprofit. Ask plenty of questions and shop around before making a long-term commitment.
3. **Set goals and decide what's in it for you.** Your volunteer experience can be an opportunity to work on a project outside of your normal work responsibilities, fine tune a specific set of skills, or learn new things to which you otherwise wouldn't be exposed. Decide what you want to accomplish and match your goals with the organization's.
4. **Clarify your role, responsibilities, and expectations.** If there is no written job description, make sure you are sure what you are required to do, as well as what you are not permitted to do. Keep in contact with your supervisor, ask questions, and get feedback about your performance. Share your thoughts and feelings about the experience with the organization – it will help them to plan and organize more effectively in the future.
5. **Extend your involvement beyond volunteering.** Attend the organization's events and contribute to its annual fund to show your support and commitment.

Specific volunteering opportunities can be found online at:

- [Idealist.org](http://Idealist.org)
- [Volunteermatch.org](http://Volunteermatch.org)
- [Volunteersolutions.org](http://Volunteersolutions.org)