

GROUP VOLUNTEERING

TOOLS AND RESOURCES
FOR ORGANIZATIONS AND VOLUNTEER CENTRES



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What is Group Volunteering?

Group volunteering involves engaging in a volunteer activity as a group, whether with friends, family, colleagues or acquaintances. Group volunteering can involve a specific project with a set timeframe, or it may involve an ongoing commitment shared by a group of volunteers.

Group volunteering can provide support and services in a community in a short timeframe, as it involves many people working together instead of individual volunteers involved in independent tasks.

Some people prefer to carry out volunteer work accompanied by their family members, to enjoy more time together as a family. Other group volunteers are work colleagues who, after a day's work, decide to donate some time to strengthen

their relationships or to socialize outside work hours. On other occasions, a group of friends may wish to volunteer once a year to enjoy a pleasant moment together, to feel that they are useful to their community without feeling obligated to volunteer for a specific period of time.

Some companies have corporate volunteer programs. At least once a year, the company allows employees to act as volunteers within work hours. This practice is being adopted by more and more businesses. It benefits a company's corporate image, contributes to employee and customer satisfaction and provides the company with fiscal advantages. The final objective is to assist those in need and to contribute to the welfare of the community.





Finding group volunteering opportunities

This following list may be helpful for groups looking for volunteer activities and organizations looking for ways to engage groups.

Examples of activities that may be carried out by groups:

- helping to run a festival or walk-a-thon
- cooking or serving meals and cleaning up afterwards
- putting together packets or mailings
- gardening (pulling weeds, planting, etc.)
- sorting items from a food or clothing bank
- cleaning or painting items, several walls, or an entire facility
- an environmental project such as: cleaning a beach, a field, a river bank, or an alley, or Earth Day projects
- any activity that can be done by simple, repetitive action, like cutting fabric or paper from a form
- organizing an activity for seniors or children
- helping at a women's shelter
- participating in community events
- Collections are another great way to harness the collective power of your group. Opportunities abound in every season: food drives in the summer, gift drives for the holidays, back-to-school collections in August. Collections are easy to coordinate year-round, and are especially good when people may have erratic schedules (during the holidays or summer) and cannot easily participate in a hands-on project.
- Skills-based volunteering is the practice of using work-related knowledge and expertise in a volunteer opportunity. Examples of skills-based volunteering include: accountants organizing tax clinics, lawyers managing legal clinics, gardeners helping in senior's residences or shelters.
- Groups who have a Meals on Wheels service in their area can offer to take on specific delivery routes on a specific day of the week.

Suggestions for where to start:

- contact your local volunteer centre
- look for events held by local nonprofits organizations, charities and schools
- ask group members to contact organizations working for a cause to which they feel connected or attracted. They can ask about potential group volunteering activities.

Sometimes organizations who do not already receive groups of volunteers are willing to create special projects or activities for groups, depending on the number of participants and their available dates.



Designing group volunteer activities

Most organizations simply do not have the budget, staff, time, or other resources to create two-hour, half-day or one-day group volunteering activities. For this reason, it is helpful if the group looking to volunteer can propose or design an activity for the organization.

The first step in designing a group activity is to brainstorm among the members of the group, to think creatively about activities that can be done together.

The second step is to determine the resources and limits of the group who will be performing the activity, such as availability, budget, season, number of participants, physical limitations among the participants, etc.

The third step is to decide on a project or activity and to present the idea to the organization (s) selected.

Another approach is to contact the potential organization and introduce the group and their wish to volunteer. Some organization can build a customized volunteering activity for a motivated group.

And, finally activities can be organized so that the group can volunteer from their offices or homes. Examples of such activities are mailings, gift wrapping, preparing Christmas baskets or back-to-school bags, making phone calls to raise funds or friendly calls to people who live in isolation, etc.





Scheduling

Provide a variety of scheduling options for groups who wanting to volunteer.

OCCASIONAL

Friends, family, colleagues or acquaintances

Opportunities that could be suitable for incorporating occasional group volunteering include:

- Holiday events
- Seasonal activities
- Annual events
- Special or fundraising events

FLEXIBLE

This option allows groups to volunteer on a regular, consistent schedule that can be adjusted according to the group's preferences.

ONGOING

This option supports groups who volunteer consistently at a fixed day and time for a specific period of time.

This is ideal for organizations that rely heavily on volunteers for specific tasks and are dependent on volunteers during specific hours, e.g. food or clothing banks, shopping outings, community meals, or Meals on Wheels.

Group volunteering resource list



Group volunteering resource list

RECRUITMENT

[Skills-Based Volunteering Discussion Paper](#)

[Understanding Canadian Volunteers](#)

[Volunteer Connections: New Strategies for Involving Youth](#)

[Volunteer Connections: New Strategies for Involving Older Adults](#)

[Targeted Recruitment Exercise](#)

DESIGNING A VOLUNTEER ASSIGNMENT

[A Matter of Design: Job Design theory and application to the voluntary sector](#)

[Leadership basics: A Guide to Leading Groups of Volunteers](#)

[Working with Volunteers](#)





Program Checklist

PREPARING FOR GROUPS OF VOLUNTEERS

	YES	NO	NOTES
Do you need to develop new methods for recruiting groups of volunteers?			
Do you need to develop group volunteering assignments?			
Can you apply your existing screening process for individuals to volunteer groups?			
Do you have activities that will be attractive to groups?			
Do you have tasks and assignments that can be developed or altered to be appropriate to the ages, education levels, cultural identifications and experiences of volunteer groups?			
Do you have orientation and training material that is sensitive to culturally diverse populations?			
Are there additional training programs that need to be considered?			



Volunteer Recognition

RECOGNIZING VOLUNTEER GROUPS

	YES	NO	NOTES
Do you need to develop methods of recognizing group participation?			
Do you have ways of recognizing each member of the group uniquely?			
Do you have a budget for reimbursing or providing volunteer expenses? i.e. travel expenses, childcare, volunteer meals and vouchers?			
Do you have policies around volunteer recognition?			



Scheduling

EFFECTIVE AND FLEXIBLE ARRANGEMENTS AND ACCOMMODATION

	YES	NO	NOTES
Do you have a facility that can accommodate volunteer groups (small or large groups)?			
Do you have the ability to provide occasional or flexible or on-going scheduling sometimes required for group volunteering?			
Do you have the ability to allow the group to carry out the activity (ies) from its facility?			

Volunteer Resource Management

POLICIES AND PRACTICES FOR EFFECTIVE GROUPS' ENGAGEMENT

	YES	NO	NOTES
Do you have enough staff to supervise volunteer groups?			
Do you have risk and liability policies? Do you have insurance?			
Do you have policies around safety and rules?			



Group Volunteering Spectrum

LEVELS OF ENGAGEMENT

This spectrum highlights different methods or strategies for organizations to engage group volunteers.

Each box links to information, practices and opportunities for implementing an effective group volunteering initiative.

VOLUNTEER ACTIVITIES	Arranging separate activities for different groups at the same time	Offering a specific project with a set timeframe or with a medium-long range commitment	Offering activities that can be carried out by groups of family, friends or colleagues	Designing and/or creating activities for volunteer groups
VOLUNTEER RECOGNITION	Volunteer Awards / Appreciation	Gifts / Certificates / Vouchers	Meals and snacks	Travel Expenses
SCHEDULING	Occasional	Flexible	On-Going	
VOLUNTEER RESOURCE MANAGEMENT	Evaluating a group volunteer program and volunteer performance	Periodic review of group volunteering – or Formal pre-arranged evaluation meetings	Incorporating feedback from volunteer groups	Offering decision-making authority to the members of the group



Volunteer Activities

ARRANGING SEPARATE ACTIVITIES FOR DIFFERENT GROUPS SIMULTANEOUSLY

Arranging separate activities for different groups at the same time benefits the organization and volunteers at the same time.

For the organizations it:

- Reduces the time to organize activities
- Facilitates the process of training of volunteers

For the volunteers it:

- Facilitates the process of finding opportunities
- Increases the chances to interact and meet different people

OFFERING A SPECIFIC PROJECT WITH A SET TIMEFRAME OR WITH A MEDIUM-LONG TERM COMMITMENT

The group takes responsibility for the project which provides a sense of autonomy to the group, as it must organize itself in order to achieve the intended goal.

Taking responsibility creates a link between the volunteers and the organization, and increases the volunteers' commitment.

Volunteer motivation is very important to carry out these activities. They enjoy teaching others and working independently.

Some examples of specific projects:

- cleaning or painting an entire facility
- organizing a fundraising campaign or event

- offering activities that can be carried out by groups of family, friends or colleagues

When an organization provides activities that can be made by all family members, including children, volunteers often show more interest to volunteer. Children are sometimes a constraint on an individual's ability to volunteer.

Some organizations simply do not accept children as volunteers for various reasons. Perhaps there are no activities that can be carried out by children, or the organization does not have a policy that covers accidents involving children.

DESIGNING AND/OR CREATING ACTIVITIES FOR VOLUNTEER GROUPS

Volunteer groups can participate in brainstorming sessions in order to come up with new ideas that can be transformed into new group volunteer activities.

Internal meetings with the volunteer coordinator and the staff, in order to analyze the organization needs, can result in potential activities for groups of volunteers.

Volunteers can be invited to the internal meetings to exchange ideas with the volunteer coordinator and the staff, and to choose the project from among the activities suggested. They can contribute to designing the project in more detail. Being involved from the ground up can build motivation and commitment.



Volunteer Recognition

GIVING VOLUNTEER AWARDS/APPRECIATION

“Thank you” or “Way to go” is the “pay check” for a volunteer. Expressions of appreciation and recognition are important in keeping them motivated and enthusiastic. There are many ways to show that appreciation, always depending on the organization’s culture and budget. To the volunteer, recognition signifies that someone notices and someone cares.

Some examples of recognition: an unexpected thank you note, taking photos and then offering them to the group, including an article about the activity carried out by the volunteer group in the organization newsletter or website, a certificate of recognition.

GIFTS / CERTIFICATES / VOUCHERS

Some gifts with a low cost to recognize the work of volunteers are:

- Promotional material that already exists, such as T-shirts, mugs, pins, pens, games, etc.
- Gift cards
- Food vouchers

Meals and snacks

Food, snacks or meals are a good way to support and recognize volunteers’ work:

- Providing food or snacks during the break
- Organizing a picnic or a pizza party may be another way to show appreciation

Travel Expenses

Travel expenses can be an impediment for groups wanting to volunteer, especially if the organization where they will perform the activity is outside their area of work or where they live.

An organization can contribute with bus tickets or reimburse travel or fuel expenses.

Organizations should talk to volunteer groups about the need for reimbursement, ideally before the activity. Otherwise, the subject can be broached during orientation.

SCHEDULING

Occasional

Daily and weekly routines often keep people busy at their jobs, looking after children, enjoying their hobbies or sharing time with family or friends. All these activities reduce the chance of helping their community on a regular basis.

Scheduling occasional activities helps groups wanting to volunteer to donate time in a specific period of the year such as holidays, annual events, special projects, etc.

Flexible

Volunteers like freedom and spontaneity of action. A flexible activity is one that you can perform whenever you have some uncommitted time.

Providing flexible opportunities for volunteer groups facilitates their commitment to volunteering activities.

On-Going

This option supports groups who volunteer consistently on a fixed day and time for a specific period of time.

It is ideal for organizations that rely heavily on volunteers for specific tasks and are dependent on volunteers during specific hours.



Volunteer Resource Management

EVALUATING A GROUP VOLUNTEERING PROGRAM AND VOLUNTEER

PERFORMANCE

Evaluation places a value on something and is a critical component to the effective delivery of an organization's programs.

Evaluation is a useful guide to assessing if there is a good match between what is being done, who is doing it and how it could get done more efficiently.

An evaluation of a volunteer program should include:

- reviewing goals and objectives
- identifying results achieved
- obtaining feedback from current volunteers and clients
- collecting and reviewing both quantitative and qualitative data about volunteer involvement
- volunteer efforts
- the program itself

It is also important to evaluate whether the group volunteering program continues to serve the mission and goals of an organization.

Another good practice is to evaluate a group volunteering performance. While individual performance can be monitored, it is also useful to look at the contributions being made collectively by the group unit and identify any strengths or areas for improvement that exist.

PERIODIC REVIEW OF GROUP VOLUNTEERING

Program evaluation may be composed of two levels, namely, informal periodic reviews or formal meetings which are pre-arranged. The choice of evaluation strategies depends on the nature, size and composition of the organization.

To establish positive and progressive relations between the group volunteers and the organization, it is important to evaluate the experience of the volunteers in the group.

Taking a little time to discuss the experience with the group at the end of their assigned task also provides a valuable insight about the experience, as well as the skills and abilities required to perform the activities.

FORMAL PRE-ARRANGED EVALUATION MEETINGS

Formal pre-arranged evaluation meetings are important to assist in identifying progress on the organization's mission and completion of goals and tasks, in coordinating the engagement of the volunteer group.

Group volunteers at formal pre-arranged meetings may discuss various aspects of their engagement, such as:

- New skills that the volunteers acquired or wish to develop
- The persons that could help them to acquire these new skills
- Skills or attitudes which need improvement
- Areas that have caused difficulty to the volunteers
- Future commitments and adjustments



Volunteer Resource Management

INCORPORATING FEEDBACK FROM GROUP VOLUNTEERS

Feedback from group volunteers can be very helpful and can give rise to improvements in your program. Ask individual volunteers or the group as a whole, for their opinions on how much progress was made on the task in which they were engaged, what helped, what got in the way etc.

This will provide you with diverse opinions which could lead to the introduction of new ideas, and the elimination of inefficient activities.

OFFERING DECISION-MAKING AUTHORITY TO THE MEMBERS OF THE GROUP

Volunteers should be given the opportunity to decide what they want to do, how to organize for the volunteer activity. Once the activity is accomplished, ask them if there is something that they would change or add. Invite them to present their ideas or suggestions and be open to accepting them if they are appropriate. Explain your reasoning if you do not accept them. This proves you are sincere in seeking their opinions.

Orientation, training and supervision must be provided by the organization. Volunteers must know in advance the activities that they will be carrying on.



SECTION FOR VOLUNTEER CENTRES

Managing requests from groups wanting to volunteer

Volunteer centres may receive requests from groups wanting to volunteer in various ways. The most common are a telephone call or an on-line contact via the organization website.

Through telephone contact, a request may be dealt with as follows:

- 1 The client is informed that the opportunities are available on the website.
- 2 The client is invited to search the website, indicating that if no opportunity can be found, he / she should contact the centre by e-mail through the web page, using the online request form for Group Volunteering.

In cases in which the client has already searched for group opportunities and has not found an appropriate match, or if the centre does not have on-line searchable opportunities, some basic information is required in order to facilitate the search for opportunities.

The steps to follow when a request is received through the website are as follows:

- 1 The system sends an automatic e-mail indicating to the client that the request has been received and will be dealt with expeditiously.
- 2 Once the request has been analyzed, the search for opportunities begins. If necessary, the client is contacted for further information or to clarify any issues.

- 3 The available tools are used to carry out the search, namely a database of organizations, the Internet, and other internal means. It is recommended to inform the client that the response time will be between one and two weeks.

- 4 Once the search has taken place, potential organizations are contacted to engage the group. When an organisation has responded positively, the client is contacted to explain the nature of the activity and to provide the necessary information about the organization, including the person to contact.

- 5 To avoid misunderstandings, it is recommended to step away at this stage, and leave the two interested parties to communicate directly with one another. The success of the activity depends on their developing an independent relationship.

- 6 Request evidence and photographs of the activity to be used by the volunteer centre for promotional purposes.

- 7 Follow up. Contact each of the parties separately in order to obtain feedback on the activity.



SECTION FOR VOLUNTEER CENTRES

Matching groups wanting to volunteer with organizations

Finding activities for groups wanting to volunteer and matching the availability of the groups with recruiting organizations' schedules is one of the most difficult challenges in the process of "matching".

The group size is one factor to consider. Groups in excess of 50 persons are the most difficult to place. Organizations often do not have the necessary physical space to accommodate such a large group. It is suggested, if possible, to divide the groups into sub-groups of a maximum of 15 persons.

Another problem relates to the available date of the group. Many organizations are closed after work hours and on weekends. This creates challenges in finding opportunities for employee groups, families, or friends who wish to volunteer outside work hours.

Another factor that can be limiting is the presence of children within groups of friends and family members. Some organizations do not accept minors as volunteers and there are some activities that cannot be carried out by children.





Volunteer Group Appreciation and Recognition – Template

TO:

(group name)

FROM:

(community organization name)

SUBJECT:

(name of the volunteer project)

On behalf of (host community organization's name), thank you for volunteering on (date). With your help, we were able to (project results/benefits). (Community's organization name) was impressed with your hard work and dedication to the community.

We hope your volunteer experience as a group was a fun and rewarding one. We would appreciate receiving your feedback so we can make our next volunteer activity even better - please take a moment to fill out a brief evaluation form by (provide instructions on how to access). Once you've completed the evaluation form, you'll be able to access all of the great photos taken during the volunteering activity.

Thank you again for doing such a great job and for making our project a huge success! We couldn't have done it without you!

Sincerely,

[Redacted signature area]

(Volunteer coordinator or Director name)



Photo Release Form for Groups – Template

PHOTO/VIDEO WAIVER AND RELEASE FORM

(For groups)

I (team leader name),

First name:

Family name:

acting on behalf of (insert the name of the group)

Address:

City: Postal code:

AUTHORIZE

(insert the name and address of the organization)

TO

(Please check the appropriate box(es))

- Take pictures, record, or film while our group participates in the organization's volunteer activities.
- Use these images in any publications, displays, presentations or other related use in any format (print, electronic, on-line, or other media) for the purposes of documenting and promoting their activities and projects.

On behalf of the group (insert the name of the group) I hereby waive any copyright or other rights we might have to these images, in perpetuity.

Team Leader Name (please write clearly/in block letters):

Signature:

Date: