

# *V*olunteering



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**How to Build  
Your Career  
by Helping  
Others**

This book shows how volunteering can be a valuable part of your career path. It can increase your life and work exploration by helping you:

- Understand how you can contribute to your community through volunteer work
- Discover how you can gain work skills, knowledge and attitudes through leisure activities and volunteer work
- Determine the skills, knowledge and attitudes you can transfer from volunteer activities to a variety of work roles
- Explore volunteering as a proactive job search and personal development strategy
- Identify relationships gained through volunteering that can help you find work
- Connect with further information and resources.

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Alberta Human Resources and Employment  
People, Skills and Workplace Resources  
Telephone (780) 422-1794 Fax (780) 422-5319  
E-mail [info@alis.gov.ab.ca](mailto:info@alis.gov.ab.ca)

**To order print copies please contact**  
Learning Resources Centre  
12360-142 Street  
Edmonton, AB T5L 4X9  
Internet [www.alis.gov.ab.ca/careershop](http://www.alis.gov.ab.ca/careershop)  
Fax (780) 422-9750 Telephone (780) 427-5775  
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# GETTING BY GIVING

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Are you looking for a job but don't have the experience? And you can't get the experience because you can't get a job?

Do you need more skills, or more connections, to find work?

Are you thinking of changing your line of work or maybe going back to school but have no idea what to do?

Try volunteering.

“Give my time away? How will that solve my career problems?” you ask. Good question. But when you think about it, volunteering makes a lot of career sense.

## **Think of it as an investment**

Volunteering is one of the best investments you can make with your time. The more you give, the more you get. But the rewards are not the kind you measure in dollars and cents. On top of the difference you can make in the lives of others, volunteering pays many career-building dividends. Here's how.

Volunteering helps you:

- get more work experience to put on your resumé
- show off the skills you already have
- learn new skills
- meet people and make connections that may help you get work
- try out career ideas by working in fields that interest you
- demonstrate your maturity to future employers.

As if that weren't enough, volunteering also:

- lets you express your values and beliefs through community service
- makes you feel great
- costs nothing.

How's that for an investment in your future?

What do you have to offer? Plenty!

From designing a computerized database for a women's shelter to simply sharing a smile with someone who is ill or having a tough time, everyone has unique contributions they can make. You may not be aware of them all yet, but you have lots of skills and personal qualities that you can use to help others. And you can build your resumé in the process. This book will show you how.



## *Volunteering is...*

Sharing your skills and time without expecting pay  
Showing that you care about someone or something else  
Thinking beyond your own needs and wishes—a sign of maturity  
Expressing your beliefs and values through service  
Improving your own well being while helping others

## **W**hat's in it for you?

Devoting your time to a worthy cause can offer big payoffs. For example, volunteering could help you to:

- Check out careers that might interest you
- Learn new skills and grow as a person
- Get experience for your resumé
- Feel more confident in your abilities
- Translate your interests into action
- Get a feel for the workplace
- Make a career change
- Express yourself
- Feel good
- Connect with your community
- Explore your world
- Know yourself.

# HOW VOLUNTEERING PAYS OFF

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**V**olunteering is a win-win situation. When you find a volunteer role that’s right for you, everyone comes out ahead. For the people whose lives you touch, your contribution can ease pain, create hope and expand opportunities. What’s more, your volunteering can help make your neighborhood, your community and your world a better place to live.

Some of the greatest rewards of volunteering will flow back to you. Your “investment” in volunteering gives you a chance to:

## 1. Check out careers

Have you had a career dream since you were a kid? Perhaps you’ve always wanted to be a veterinarian or a writer or an automotive technician. Or maybe you’ve been tossing a few career ideas around but you’re not sure yet what you want to do. Volunteering gives you a chance to explore different occupations—and to meet the people, challenges and rewards they involve. Along the way, you may even discover new interests that you never considered before.



*When Janet was in high school, she dreamed of working in a hospital. When she had a chance to get more training, she couldn’t decide what she wanted to do. By volunteering in several areas of a hospital, she learned more about respiratory therapy, nursing and administration and was better able to make her training decision.*

## 2. Learn new skills and grow as a person

You will use hundreds of skills for working and living over the course of your lifetime. Some you use every day. Some you use occasionally. And, because the world around you and the world of work are changing constantly, there will always be new

skills you will need to learn. Volunteering gives you a chance to sharpen the skills you already have and learn new ones that can help you build your career.

A word of caution—be realistic about your skill level when you apply for volunteer work. An organization may need people with more skills than you have to offer in the role you want. You may need to develop skills before taking on more challenging positions.



*Jake wanted to be an addictions counsellor, so he volunteered in an agency that let him explore the occupation. He asked to be included in counselling sessions and staff meetings. But he didn't realize that client information is confidential and that his sitting in on sessions might be disruptive. The agency welcomed him but found him a more appropriate role to start with.*

## **W**hat skills do you have to offer?

Volunteering is a great way to practice the skills you have and gain new skills that could be useful in getting work in the future. Stop a minute and take inventory of the skills you have. Chances are, you have way more than you think you do.

First, there are the **technical skills** that allow you to do special jobs not everyone can do. For example, play a guitar, speak Spanish or give First Aid.

What special skills do you have that make you unique?

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**Personal skills** help you to handle day-to-day living. These include things like your habits and attitudes. For example, one person may be known for his or her sense of humour and flexibility, another for always being on time, and yet another for being willing to learn new things.

What habits or attitudes do you have that would be useful in a job?

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You also have many skills that are **transferable**. You learn them in one situation, but they can be equally useful somewhere else. For example, leadership skills gained while volunteering as a day camp leader might come in handy in a job as a teacher's assistant. Likewise, cash handling skills learned while volunteering at fundraising events would be useful when applying for work as a cashier in a restaurant.

What transferable skills do you have that might help you in a future job?

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Any of the skills you listed may be useful to a volunteer organization or to an employer.

### 3. Get experience

Most employers want workers who have practical experience, but it's hard to get that experience if you can't get a job. Your technical training is important, but knowing how to use your skills in a real workplace is also critical. It's important to employers that you know how to manage your time, get along with others and show commitment.

So, how do you prove you can do these things? Volunteering can help you get the workplace experience you need.



*Ashley studied word processing in a computer training program. She hoped the course would help her get a job, but she didn't have much success in her job search. Employers wanted someone with workplace experience. So she volunteered to type correspondence for her church and format a training manual for a daycare centre. The organizations were pleased with her work and gave her letters of reference.*

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### 4. Keep on top of things while unemployed

Getting discouraged in your search for a new job or career direction? Volunteering can help you feel active, useful and productive. Volunteering your skills is also a great way to keep them sharp during a period of unemployment.

## 5. Feel more confident

No matter who you are, you can get a confidence boost by learning new things, using your abilities, meeting new people and helping others. Each time you achieve something, even a tiny goal, you are building confidence that will help you in the work world.

Volunteering lets you try new experiences, meet new challenges and discover new strengths. The confidence you feel shows, and employers want confident employees.

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*Remi loves hockey. A mobility problem prevents him from playing actively, so he volunteered to be the team manager for his nephew's minor hockey team. Remi gained confidence in his ability to organize events and became known for his excellent skills in planning trips, co-ordinating tournaments and raising funds. The director of a local recreation centre noticed his ability and hired him as a program co-ordinator.*

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## 6. Turn your interests into action

Looking for ways to discover new interests or use the ones you already have? Your hobbies and other leisure activities may help you connect with an exciting volunteer role that could lead to a new occupation.

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*Mike volunteered his skills in photography to help create a display for an environmental group. Several of his photographs were published in the group's national newsletter. Mike added these photos to his portfolio. They helped him get accepted to college and find part-time work on a community newspaper.*

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## 7. Express yourself

Do you feel strongly about some issue or cause? Volunteering is a powerful way to make a statement about what you believe in. In fact, by volunteering, you put your beliefs into action. And your actions can make a real impact. Volunteering gives you

a chance to practice effective ways to express your opinions, contribute ideas and solve problems—all very important skills in any workplace.

## **8. Get a feel for the workplace**

Have you ever felt like a stranger in a new situation? Volunteering can give you a feel for an occupation or workplace that interests you. It can also help you become more comfortable with the people, the “language” and the expectations involved.

By volunteering in a variety of organizations, you get to experience many ways of working. You also gain a better understanding of what kinds of jobs are available.



*Ravi planned to make a career change from retail sales to social work. He volunteered at several social service agencies so he could better understand the challenges and rewards of the occupation. His effort paid off. He felt more comfortable with his decision after talking to the social workers, counsellors and clients.*

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## **9. Make a career change**

Planning to try something new? Volunteering can help you take the transferable skills you already have and “customize” them for use in a new occupation or job. By first getting volunteer experience in a new field of work, you can make your skills more relevant to your new goal.



*Heather knew her writing and organizing skills would be useful in the public relations certificate program she planned to enter. She decided to use her skills in a volunteer role that would give her even more related experience. She offered her time to write public service announcements for the volunteer centre and helped plan the opening celebration for the new library in her neighbourhood.*

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## **10. Feel healthy and happy**

Feeling trapped or just plain blah? Does your life seem boring or stressful? Shake things up a bit and volunteer. By volunteering,

you will find new challenges that energize you or activities that help you relax. If you work alone, choose something that involves contact with people. If you sit a lot, choose a physical activity like coaching or tree planting. If you are focused exclusively on one subject, try something completely different during your volunteer hours. Exercise your skills, interests and ideas, especially the ones you've been neglecting.

Employers want healthy, energized workers who can deal with stress. Research shows that rewarding volunteer activity and helping others improves people's mental, emotional and physical health.

Think about how you can use volunteer activities to help you relax and deal with work stress.



*Rick works for an automotive wholesaler in the shipping area. He works alone and finds the amount of work and repetition in the job stressful. He used to go out drinking to forget work.*

*But his drinking was affecting his friendships and he often missed work. He decided to help a friend by volunteering as assistant coach of a kids' basketball team. Now he meets other adults, has fun and takes satisfaction in seeing how the kids benefit from the team.*

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## 11. Connect with your community

The world is a bigger place than you can ever imagine. So is your own community. Volunteering allows you to be part of cultures, issues, activities and lifestyles you might never experience otherwise. It's a chance to learn about other people's needs, appreciate their abilities, hear their opinions and see things from new perspectives. In short, it prepares you for the same kinds of people experiences you will encounter in your work life.

## 12. Get to know yourself

Volunteer experiences can be a good way to learn more about yourself—your abilities, interests and commitment—as well as your potential to grow and develop. Volunteering also gives you a chance to find out how other people see you and your strengths. Who knows? You might learn all kinds of new things about yourself.



*Darcy thought he wanted to be a firefighter, so he joined the volunteer fire department in his county to try it out. He soon learned that he wasn't comfortable in small spaces. But he did enjoy emergency work and did well in first aid training. He decided to become an emergency medical technician.*

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## What does it take to be a volunteer?

CARING...enough to do something

INITIATIVE...to turn your caring into action

COMMITMENT...to follow through on the promises you make

Guess what? Paid workers need these qualities too!

## HOW TO GET INVOLVED

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o you think you might like to volunteer. Now the question is how, when and where?

You probably already volunteer informally by helping people you know—shovelling an elderly neighbor’s sidewalk or helping your grandmother fill out her income tax return, for example. Some people help each other out by creating informal groups like babysitting co-ops. You can find more structured volunteer opportunities in not-for-profit or charitable organizations.

### **Big or small?**

Some not-for-profit organizations are operated totally by volunteers—most community leagues, minor sports teams and clubs, for example. Other organizations, like hospitals, are managed by paid staff but depend on volunteers to provide many services that improve the lives of their clients.

Groups and projects co-ordinated entirely by volunteers may have a different “personality” than organizations managed by paid staff. They may depend more on volunteer leadership, donated services and member contributions to make things happen.

Don’t assume that “bigger is always better.” Just as both paid and volunteer workers can manage excellent organizations, they can both operate ineffective, poorly organized groups.

Not all agencies, not-for-profit groups and organizations are alike. No two youth clubs, museums or volunteer centres will provide the same opportunities or support to volunteers. While some groups are part of national organizations, never assume that one local chapter is just like another. For example, YWCAs and YMCAs operate all around the world, but each location offers different programs and services.

## How's your time?

How much time do you have to spare? Can you make a long-term commitment? Many volunteer opportunities are short-term and may require just a few hours or a few days to complete. Designing a poster for the local food bank, selling tickets at a summer theatre festival or delivering food hampers at Christmas are examples.

Other volunteer experiences require a long-term commitment to be effective. Some ongoing jobs need one particular person to provide continuity. And some volunteer roles involve building relationships with people, such as tutoring or being a Big Brother or Big Sister. The fact that you stuck with a long-term volunteer job tells a prospective employer that you probably have good employability skills, such as the ability to get along with others, as well as responsibility and commitment.



*Because of his construction experience, Matt offered volunteer time to co-ordinate the renovation of the community hall. To be sure the job was done well and finished on time, he needed to be available many hours throughout the fall and winter. He added the experience to his resumé.*

*Sam volunteers four evenings a month on the Distress Line. She worked hard to complete the training. She knows how important her contribution is to suicide prevention, and the experience will help her in her social work career.*

*Danica and Jan are concerned about recycling. They have been volunteering with several other people to set up a recycling centre in their town. They know that it will take time to successfully change people's habits and develop their own skills.*

*When Darren decided to become a Big Brother to a younger boy, he was asked to make a commitment of at least one year. It would be difficult for a child if this friendship was short term.*

*Jalena tutors students who are learning English. It takes time to build the trust required to work effectively with her two students. She agrees to be a volunteer tutor three hours a week for at least eight months. She knows that this experience will be valuable to her if she works with people in a teaching or training role in the future.*

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## Where to find volunteer work

Just look around you. The world is full of “clues” to volunteer work that needs to be done. Below are a few avenues to check out.

### Family and friends

Do you know someone who volunteers? Ask them about what they do, why they do it and how they got involved. Their experiences may help you make your own volunteering decisions. They may also have some good contacts to offer.



*Scott's friend, Dave, is a volunteer organizer for a folk music festival. He asked Scott to help set up portable fences and tents at the site. Scott met other people who liked folk music, got to meet some of the performers and even enjoyed a few beers with the crew after the concert. The next year he volunteered to be part of the staging crew for the entire four days of the festival and learned more about staging and lighting.*

*Dana volunteered at the women's shelter after learning about it from her mother. She is thinking about a career in social work but needs more experience before making her choice. The shelter may provide that experience.*

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### Volunteer Centres

Chances are there's a volunteer centre in your community where you can learn more about volunteer opportunities. Volunteer centres operate like employment agencies, matching not-for-profit groups and charitable organizations with people willing to help them. Often job descriptions are available outlining specific duties, along with the skills and time required.

Volunteer centre staff will take information about you, including your interests and skills and the amount of time you can give. They will then try to match you with an appropriate organization or project. Some centres have computer databases to assist matching opportunities to your needs. Some have volunteer opportunity listings that you can browse yourself.



*Andy wanted a chance to learn more about health care workplaces because he was considering a career in rehabilitation or health promotion. He made an appointment at the volunteer centre. The referral counsellor showed him a binder of health and rehabilitation volunteer opportunities. She also asked him about his skills, interests, goals and availability.*

*Andy took away three volunteer ideas: making presentations for an addictions prevention program; assisting teenage residents in a long-term care facility with recreation therapy programs; and helping public health nurses with school immunization programs. He followed up by calling the contact at each agency to get more information. He went to interviews for two of the opportunities and decided he would enjoy the recreation therapy role. He gained new skills in working with teens and learned more about long-term care.*

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## **Groups**

Do you or someone you know belong to a group which may be interested in contributing something to your community? Volunteering as a group is a great way to socialize while helping others. It is also an easy way to begin volunteering because you are with people you know. Perhaps you know a group of friends or people at work, in a club, on a sports team or at church who'd like to make a difference.



*Travis heard about a family who lost everything in a fire. He got together with co-workers from the grocery store where he packed bags to organize a benefit concert to raise funds for the family. The group used their skills and connections to find other volunteers and to get food and equipment donated. The store manager was impressed with their teamwork and noticed how well Travis had co-ordinated the event. When a new position came open in the store, the manager told Travis that he would be considered for the position.*

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## Agencies/organizations

Many not-for-profit organizations recruit new volunteers directly through posters, the media or presentations. Maybe you've heard of an interesting volunteer opportunity you'd like to try. Why not contact the organization for more information?

Larger organizations like hospitals, museums, festivals and shelters may have a paid volunteer manager on staff. Pick up the phone and contact them directly to find out what opportunities exist and how to get involved.

Other organizations may not have a designated volunteer co-ordinator. Call the main number and ask who to contact.

Smaller groups that are run entirely by volunteers with no paid staff may be more difficult to reach. Try to find out the name of the president or chairperson of the group. You may be able to get help by phoning the community services, recreation or social services department in your community. You might also try the yellow pages under "Clubs" and "Associations," or check out the community service directories in your local library.





*Josh was interested in a career as a police officer. He wondered how he could get some experience that would give him a feel for work in this area. So he contacted the RCMP in his town and found out about several community policing projects, like Victims Assistance and Rural Crime watch, that need volunteers. By volunteering with Victims Assistance, he was able to explore his career idea more fully.*

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## **School and other educational institutions**

Have you participated in a community service project, field placement or practicum at school? Was it with a not-for-profit or public organization that uses volunteers? Did you enjoy the activities, people or organizations you were involved with? Maybe you can expand your involvement through volunteering. Contact your instructor or the agency for more information.

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*When Kate was in junior high, she enjoyed her placement helping residents at an extended care centre with crafts and table games. As an adult she decided to check out other volunteer roles that would give her career experience working with older people. She considered a seniors' recreation centre and a care facility for people with Alzheimer's disease. These choices will give her two very different perspectives.*

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## **Media**

As a public service, radio and TV stations often broadcast messages about volunteer opportunities with not-for-profit organizations. Newspapers devote a lot of space to the newsworthy activities of not-for-profit organizations as well as listings of their volunteer needs. Watch and listen for stories, photographs, advertisements and announcements that might interest you.



*Rupa heard an announcement on the radio about the need for tour guides and interpreters at a large museum. She used the telephone number in the radio message to contact the volunteer co-ordinator at the museum. She attended an information session and decided to apply to volunteer. The work she did at the museum let her practice public speaking, problem solving and organizing, as well as demonstrate her dependability and commitment.*

*When Liane saw a story on TV about a guide dog program that trained homeless dogs from animal shelters, she called the TV station for the group's phone number. When she contacted the group, she learned they didn't need any more trainers, but they did need volunteers to care for the dogs. So she volunteered her time to groom and walk the dogs. The experience gave her a chance to learn more about animal behaviour while enjoying the companionship of the animals.*

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## **The Internet**

Are you wired? Some not-for-profit and charitable organizations have home pages or websites where you can find out more about them. They may also list volunteer opportunities. Do a web search using words like “volunteer,” “nonprofit,” and “not-for-profit,” or try words that describe the purpose of the organization, such as “youth” or “folk music festival” or “women’s shelters.” Or go directly to the website of an organization that interests you. Some sites, like volunteer centres, may act as clearing houses for other organizations. Follow up any opportunities you learn about by phone or mail. Don’t give information about yourself on the Internet. If you are sure the organization is legitimate—for example, the SPCA or United Way—you could use the e-mail link to ask for more information. If you don’t have a computer with an Internet connection, see if your local library has one for public use. Many do.

## Your own devices

Do you see a need in your community and want to do something about it? Start a volunteer project of your own. But first, be sure to find out if other groups or individuals in your community share your concern. It's usually easier and more effective to work together rather than duplicate efforts. Think of the career-building skills you would exercise and the experience you would gain by organizing your own volunteer effort. Just a short list would include leadership, management, teamwork, organizational and communication skills.



*Marcella knew how much her town needed a daycare centre. She had difficulty getting safe child care for her son, Jessie. Together with a friend and the community services co-ordinator, she convinced a local business to donate space rent-free for two years. The space needed renovating and, with the guidance of a contractor, Marcella got her baseball team to clean, paint and decorate. They had a lot of fun, felt good about their accomplishment and, later in the year, offered to help with landscaping a play area.*

*As a result of the experience, Marcella learned more about networking, organizing, supervising and working as a team—skills she was able to claim when discussing her project in a job interview three months later.*

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Now list some volunteer agencies or types of agencies that could use your particular qualities.

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*Sharon's list of personal qualities looked like this:*

*I have First Aid training.*

*I can speak Cree.*

*I know how to cook for large numbers of people.*

*I know how to type.*

*I am strong and fit.*

*I like working with animals.*

*I have spare time on weekday mornings.*

*I'm energetic.*

*I like to work with little children.*

*Sharon checked out a volunteer teacher assistant opportunity at the preschool in her town and offered to help out in the after school care program. She also contacted a horse club that teaches children with disabilities how to ride.*

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## **2. Still more about you**

Of course, just because you have certain skills or attributes doesn't mean you'll want to use them in a volunteer job. If you work at a particular job all day, it may be the last thing you'd want to do in your spare time. But you may have other skills that don't get exercised in your usual work. Volunteering is a good way to keep them in shape.

So, think about what you are willing to contribute, the things you definitely don't want to do and what you hope to get out of a volunteer experience. Write them down.

**Time and talent**—the skills and other resources you'd gladly volunteer and when you are willing to volunteer them

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**Quests**—the new things you'd like to try or learn

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**No way!**—the things you definitely don't want to do or contribute

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*Tim responded this way.*

**Time and talent**—teaching, leading, co-ordinating, weekends, use of my car and computer

**Quest**—co-ordinate an event, learn about fundraising

**No way!**—volunteering on weeknights, working out of town

### 3. Prepare a “shopping list”

How do you know if a volunteer opportunity is right for you? Create a “shopping list” of things you hope will happen during your volunteer experience. What features are essential? What would be ideal if you were designing the volunteer job of your dreams?

When you consider a volunteer experience, ask yourself these questions:

- Does the volunteer role match my interests and values?
- Am I comfortable with the people I will be helping and the people I will be working with?
- Will I be able to learn or sharpen any skills?
- Will I get orientation and training?

- Will I be able to use some of my own ideas?
  - Does the opportunity fit the amount of time I can give?
  - Is the time convenient to me?
  - Does it require a short- or long-term commitment from me?
  - Is there opportunity for advancement or more challenge?
  - Is it in a location I can get to?
  - Are there any expenses like transportation, parking or admission?
  - Does the experience provide me with a written evaluation?
  - If I do a good job, will I get a reference?
- 



*Jarred's shopping list looked like this.*

*My volunteer experience must:*

- *let me work with computer databases*
- *give me a chance to work in an office and be part of a team*
- *be on a bus route*
- *let me volunteer about 15 hours a week*
- *give me a flexible daytime schedule while I'm job hunting.*

*Would be ideal if it also:*

- *lets me use some leadership skills*
  - *lets me contribute my ideas.*
-

What does your shopping list look like? How do the volunteer opportunities you are considering rate?

My volunteer experience:

Must	Would be ideal if it
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## **C**an't decide? Start small!

Have you found some volunteer opportunities that interest you but you're a little nervous about making a major commitment?

Perhaps you're not sure how much time you can give or whether you'll feel comfortable with the people you'll be working with.

Don't disappoint yourself or others by taking on a task that you may not be able to complete.

Start small. Take on a couple of short-term volunteer roles first.

# WORKING WITH A VOLUNTEER ORGANIZATION

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**S**o, you've found some volunteer opportunities that look pretty interesting. Now what? Here are a few tips and some ideas about what to expect as you make contact with the agencies involved and check out the possibilities. The best idea is to approach a potential volunteer job the same way you would approach a prospective paid job.

## 1. Being choosy

You bring valuable skills, energy and enthusiasm to volunteering. So it's important to make sure they're put to the best use, for the benefit of both you and the volunteer organization. You want to make a good match between your skills and their needs.

When you first make contact with the volunteer co-ordinator or other representative of the organization, ask questions. Be sure you understand the organization's purpose and what they require. Discuss your own needs and expectations.

You may be invited to an information session before you even apply to be a volunteer. This saves you and the group time and effort and lets you decide for yourself whether the volunteer opportunity interests you.

If, for any reason, you don't feel a particular volunteer job is right for you, don't be discouraged. Look for another opportunity to contribute your talents and skills. There's bound to be a volunteer position just right for you.

## 2. Going for an interview

Most organizations will ask you to go through some sort of application process to be sure they make a good match. They may ask you to fill out an application form, or they may want to interview you.

An interview gives you a chance to learn more about the organization and any other needs it may have in addition to the role you're interviewing for. Volunteer interviews are also a great way to practice for other interview situations.

Prepare for the interview as though you were applying for a paid job. Dress appropriately for the kind of volunteer role you're looking for. Be prepared to talk about your skills and experience, as well as what you hope to gain.

Sometimes an organization may have more volunteers than they need for a particular role or at a particular time. If they can't use your talents at the time, you might want to ask about other volunteer opportunities in the organization or other community groups that might welcome your contributions. You might also ask to be put on a list to be called when an opportunity opens in the future.



### **3. Trying it on for size**

If you're still not sure whether a volunteer role is a good fit for you, consider trying it on before you agree to a long-term commitment. Ask if you can “shadow” another volunteer doing a similar job. If the role involves working with a committee, ask to sit in on a meeting or two before you decide. If the opportunity involves a lot of responsibility, you may want to try a simpler job that helps you prepare for more challenge later. You can ask to be part of a team or share the job.

### **4. Attending to safety and security issues**

Don't be surprised if you are asked to give permission for the organization to contact the police to do a criminal check on you. Most volunteer groups, especially those who work with children or other vulnerable people, want to make sure their volunteers have no history of troublesome behaviour.

If you are applying to be a volunteer driver, you may be asked for a driver's abstract that shows your driving history and any traffic offenses you may have committed. These are usually on record at the government motor vehicles office or registry agencies. Be sure to discuss who is responsible for insurance if you will be using your own vehicle.

If you are handling large amounts of money, you may need to be bondable. That means the organization's insurance company may want you to answer questions designed to find out if you have a criminal record, have ever declared personal bankruptcy, or have other problems that could make you a risk in their eyes.

Most volunteers are positive, honest people, but groups must be able to ensure that their people and resources are safe and secure. Most organizations require this screening of all volunteer and paid staff.

## 5. Taking advantage of orientation and training

If you and an agency decide you are a match, most likely you will be given an orientation to the job you have agreed to do, the people you will be working with and the resources available to you. You may even receive additional training provided by the organization.

As you grow in your volunteer role, you may have the chance to participate in workshops and other activities that can build your skills and knowledge. Watch for these opportunities and take advantage of them. And, of course, add them to your resumé.

### **V**olunteer “job search” basics

1. Think about what you want in a volunteer job. Make two lists: features that are “must haves” and those that “would be nice.”
2. Choose an agency or project, or several, that fit your requirements.
3. Call ahead. Ask about volunteer opportunities.
4. Make an appointment for an interview or information session.
5. Be specific about what you hope to gain, your skills and time available.
6. Be flexible. Are you willing to consider other roles?
7. Be patient. Finding a volunteer opportunity that’s right for you may take time.
8. If at first you don’t succeed, try again—with the same agency or somewhere else.

## **6. Understanding roles and responsibilities—who’s in charge?**

In any organization things always run more smoothly when everyone understands their responsibilities and their common goals. When you take on a volunteer job, find out what your responsibilities are and who you are responsible to.

Ask for a clear, written job description spelling out what you have been asked to accomplish, who you will be working with, who you will report to, how much time you have and whether any resources are available to help you.

Your supervisor may not be the person who “hired” you for the job. Perhaps a staff person connected to your activity will supervise your work. Or you may report to another volunteer, such as a committee chairperson or the co-ordinator of a special event. Whoever the person is, it is important for you both to be clear about what goals you are working toward and how you will be helping.

It is also possible you may be your own boss or be put in a position where you are leading others.

Know your role, how you fit into the rest of the organization and the goal of your volunteer effort.

## **7. Connecting**

One of the benefits of volunteering is the contacts you can make that will help you build your career. Your volunteer experience will be more rewarding if you can find a mentor or ally within the organization. It may be the volunteer manager or a committee chairperson. Or, it may be another experienced volunteer. Look for someone who can help you learn more about the organization, introduce you to people and help you feel comfortable in your role.

## 8. Evaluation: How did you do?

Some organizations give volunteers the chance to be evaluated on their performance. They may also ask their volunteers for input and ideas on how the organization can improve volunteer opportunities. Evaluations are usually informal and should be based on your ability to do the job you agreed to do.

The evaluation may be done with the volunteer co-ordinator or the staff you worked with directly. In an all-volunteer group, the president of the organization or chairperson of the event or program you worked on may be contacted for input.

If you would like a written evaluation, request it when the evaluation session begins.

## **V**olunteering while you are job hunting

What if you are actively searching for paying work? You can still volunteer, as long as you are honest with the volunteer organization and take some things into account. For example:

1. Let the volunteer manager know you are job hunting and that your availability may change.
2. Take short-term volunteer placements. You may not be able finish longer assignments if you get a paid job.
3. Find volunteer roles with flexible hours. If you have to go to job interviews, you may not be able to commit to a definite schedule.
4. Remember you are important to the organization where you volunteer. They count on you just like a paid employee. Make sure you promise only what you can deliver.

# HOW TO “UNVOLUNTEER”

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h-oh. Your volunteer assignment is just not working out. What can you do about it? And how can you do it without causing bad feelings?

Maybe you are unhappy in your role, feel discouraged about the workload or are having difficulty with other people. Try to identify what the problem might be.

Is there anything you can do to fix it? Can you adapt, change or negotiate different volunteer arrangements? Write down some possible solutions to the problem. For example:

1. The volunteer assignment takes too much time or does not fit my schedule.

I could:

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2. The job isn't what I thought it would be.

- It's boring or too easy.
- It's too difficult or challenging.
- There's too much to do.

I could:

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3. I don't get enough support or supervision. I don't have the resources I need to do the job.

I need:

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4. I don't feel appreciated.

I would feel more appreciated if:

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5. I don't have the same beliefs as the organization or the other volunteers.

I might feel more comfortable volunteering where people value:

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6. Write down any other problem you have identified and potential solutions.

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Now that you've identified the problem, determine if there's a solution that will let you stay with the organization or if the best answer is to leave. If there is a possible solution, make an appointment to meet with your supervisor or volunteer co-ordinator and discuss the situation. State your case calmly, logically and in a friendly manner. Present your ideas for resolving the problem.

If you are unable to work with the organization to improve the situation, consider leaving. While volunteering requires patience and commitment, it is your choice where to contribute your time, energy and skills. Never be afraid to say no to a volunteer assignment you know you won't enjoy or be able to carry out effectively.

### **If you do decide to leave:**

1. Give the organization advance notice, just as you would with a paying employer.
2. Let an appropriate person in the group know why you are leaving.
3. Put your resignation in the form of a short letter directed to your volunteer manager or supervisor. Consider your wording carefully. Keep the letter brief and factual. Describe your own experience. Do not criticize or focus on the negative. The person is part of your network now and may even be a future employer or co-worker.
4. Don't just go away mad. Be constructive. The organization needs to know how they can improve conditions for you and future volunteers.
5. Don't be discouraged by a volunteer experience that didn't live up to your hopes. Consider other groups, other roles, other times. What did you learn from the experience? What would you do differently as a result?

# PUTTING YOUR VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE TO WORK FOR YOU

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**O**nce you've got some volunteer experience under your belt, you can add it to your resumé and use it to help you get paid work. Volunteer work can also help you qualify for admission to an educational program or for a scholarship. Here are some tips on how to make your experience useful for these purposes:

## 1. Identify the skills and experience you've gained

- Create a name or title for your role.
- Use the same language in describing it as a prospective employer would use.
- Demonstrate your new skills through examples.
- Describe the outcome of your volunteer activity. What did you accomplish?
- Show how the experience relates to the job or educational program you want.



*Randy volunteered to organize a baseball tournament. He described his role this way.*

### ***Tournament Co-ordinator***

- *formed a team to organize the event*
- *negotiated with businesses to donate food, entertainment and facilities*
- *arranged publicity, including posters and newspaper announcements*
- *co-ordinated the other volunteers on the project*

### ***Accomplishments/success***

- *planned and co-ordinated three-day event attended by 300 people*
  - *games, meals and social events were on time and within budget*
-

Think about a volunteer experience you've had. What did you do? Describe your activities in short sentences. What was accomplished? How did you succeed?

Volunteer title \_\_\_\_\_

Activities/ tasks/ skills

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Accomplishments/ success

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## **2. Use your volunteer experience on resumés and in portfolios**

Describe the transferable and specialized skills you used. Give specific examples that show the relationship between the volunteer role and the paid job you want.

Volunteer roles listed on a resumé can show:

- that you have skills that are useful in the workplace
- that you manage your time well
- that you work well with other people
- that you have a positive attitude.



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*Megan hoped to get a job in a veterinarian's office. She described her volunteer experience this way on her resumé.*

***Related Volunteer Experience***

- *prepared feedings and cared for injured birds  
Raptor Rehabilitation Centre (May to August 1997)*
- *maintained bird and reptile feeding records  
Brookside Zoo (May to August 1996)*
- *exercised dogs and cleaned cages  
Edmonton SPCA (weekly 1994 to 1996)*

*Mike used his volunteer activities to show prospective employers in the construction industry that he is dependable, manages his time well and gets along with other people.*

***Related Volunteer Experience***

- *constructed picnic tables for seniors' recreation centre  
Ashcroft Seniors Centre (Winter 1998)*
- *co-ordinated insulating crew on housing project  
Habitat for Humanity (Summer 1997)*
- *encouraged teamwork and organized events as a soccer coach  
Cliffside Community Centre (Fall 1994 to Summer 1997)*

*Sandi included samples of graphic design work in her portfolio. The brochure and poster she designed to promote a benefit concert for a youth shelter demonstrated her desktop publishing skills. Although she had no formal training, the materials she created showed her ability. She also mentioned these skills in her cover letter when she applied for a communications assistant job.*

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### **3. Ask for references**

A positive reference from someone you worked with as a volunteer can be a valuable asset when you apply for a paid job. Just like a paid employee, you earn a reference through effective work, excellent service and commitment.

Who should you ask for a reference? Consider the people who best understand the volunteer work you did and approach them first. Keep these points in mind:

- Be sure you really know how they feel about you and your work.
- Be sure they know you well and that the reference is fairly current.
- Ask their permission before giving their name to a prospective employer.
- Make sure they understand your goals and the kind of work you are trying to find, so they can provide an appropriate reference.

Some organizations are not able to provide personal references but will provide you with a letter that describes the volunteer role you played and the dates and length of your involvement.

### **4. Network for better career building**

Having an effective network is a big career booster. A network depends on people sharing ideas and contacts. Today you may ask someone for help. Tomorrow someone in your network may ask you to help them. Every new person you meet is a potential lead to new career opportunities and becomes part of your network.

Volunteer activities give you many chances to meet people with ideas and contacts you would not find otherwise. So when you take on a volunteer assignment, you automatically expand your network. Think about who you met while volunteering—staff, board members, other volunteers. Who else did you work with? Committees? Other organizations? Suppliers? Clients? Who do they know?



## **N**etworking know-how

In a network, what goes around, comes around. The people in your network will treat you the way you treat them.

1. Treat everyone you contact the way you like to be treated.
2. Keep an open mind. You never know who might help you and how.
3. Don't be afraid to ask for help. Just remember you may also be asked for help.
4. Share your contacts and ideas openly and others will likely do the same.
5. Don't overuse contacts. Respect their time. Avoid asking for too much, too often.
6. Always say thank you.

From *Finding Out: How to Get the Information You Need to Make the Choices You Want*, Alberta Human Resources and Employment.

# HOW YOU CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE

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**W**

hen Terry Fox set out to run across Canada, his goal was to create awareness about cancer. His quest changed the way people think about courage and raised millions of dollars for cancer research. Terry was a volunteer of heroic proportions. But, every day, people like you are performing little acts of heroism that add up to a better world for everybody.

Bryan volunteers as a member of the Search and Rescue group in his community. He was part of a team that found a little boy who had been lost in the woods.

Ross is a literacy tutor. His work helps create brighter futures every week for the people he helps with their reading skills.

Val spends time with terminally ill residents of a hospice. She's learned a lot about living.

Claire helped plant trees and lay sod on a playground where there used to be concrete. Her work makes the playground a better place for the children who use it.

Volunteering is something you can do, no matter who you are. The challenge is finding the volunteer role that's right for you. When you find it, you will also find that you, too, can make a difference in the world. What's more, by helping others you can help yourself build career skills and experience. Volunteer. It's a win-win situation for everybody.

# RESOURCES

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**Banff Volunteer Centre**  
102 Spray Ave., Box 5148  
Banff, AB T1L 1G3  
(403) 762-7693  
info@volunteerbanff.ab.ca  
**www.volunteerbanff.ab.ca**

**Volunteer Calgary**  
Suite 1170, Kahanoff Centre  
1202 Centre Street SE  
Calgary, AB T2G 5A5  
(403) 265-5633  
volunteer@volunteercalgary.  
ab.ca  
**www.volunteercalgary.ab.ca**

**Volunteer Centre of Camrose  
and District**  
3, 4516–54 Street  
Camrose, AB T4V 4W7  
(780) 672-0141  
cdss3@telusplanet.net  
**www.whyvolunteer.ca**

**Canmore Family and  
Community Resource and  
Volunteer Centre**  
902—7th Ave  
Canmore, AB T1W 3K1  
(403) 609-3743  
fcssresourcecentre@canmore.ca  
**www.canmore.ca**

**Cochrane Family and  
Community Support Services**  
The Homestead  
209, 2nd Avenue  
Mail: 101 RancheHouse Road  
Cochrane, AB T4C 2K8  
(403) 851-2250  
kim.rowe@cochrane.ca  
**www.cochrane.ca**

**Volunteer Cold Lake**  
213 Harbour View Community  
Centre  
Box 8193  
Cold Lake, AB T9M 1N1  
(780) 639-4500  
volcl@telus.net  
**www.coldlake.com**

**The Support Network,  
Volunteer Services**  
301, 11456 Jasper Ave  
Edmonton, AB T5K 0M1  
(780) 732-6648  
voled@volunteeredmonton.  
com  
**www.volunteeredmonton.  
com**

211 is an information and referral line for human services in the community. It matches volunteers with agencies needing volunteers. Dial 211 in Edmonton or 482-INFO (4636) outside Edmonton.

**www.govolunteer.ca** (for online volunteer opportunities in the Edmonton area and across Canada)

**Volunteer Centre of Fort  
Saskatchewan**  
Jubilee Recreation Centre  
10013—96 Avenue

Mailing address:  
10213—100 Avenue  
Fort Saskatchewan, AB  
T8L 1Y7  
(780) 992-6281  
vcfortsask@telus.net  
**www.fortsask.ca**

**Grande Prairie Volunteer  
Services Bureau**  
205, Centre 2000  
11330—106 Street  
Grande Prairie, AB T8V 7X9  
(780) 538-2727  
info@gpvsb.com  
**www.gpvsb.com**

**Volunteer Hanna**  
Box 1255  
401 Centre Street  
Hanna, AB T0J 1P0  
(403) 854-2099  
volunteer@hannalearning.com  
**www.aroundhanna.com**

**Hinton Volunteer and  
Information Centre**  
2nd Floor, 131 Civic Centre  
Road  
Hinton, AB T7V 2E5  
(780) 865-6060  
**www.town.hinton.ab.ca**

**Volunteer Lethbridge**  
207—13 Street North  
Lethbridge, AB T1H 2R6  
(403) 320-2044  
**www.volunteerlethbridge.  
com**

**Medicine Hat Volunteerism in Action Association**

856 Allowance Ave SE  
Medicine Hat, AB T1A 7S6  
(403) 528-4636  
info@volunteerinthehat.ca  
**www.volunteerinthehat.ca**

**Okotoks Volunteer Services**

Okotoks Recreation Centre  
99 Okotoks Drive  
Okotoks, AB T1S 1K1  
(403) 938-8935  
**www.okotoks.ca**

**Volunteer Red Deer**

Crimson Centre  
4730 Ross Street  
Red Deer, AB T4N 1X2  
(403) 346-4636  
info@volunteerreddeer.ca  
**www.volunteerreddeer.ca**

**Rimbey & District Volunteer Center**

Box 404  
Rimbey, AB T0C 2J0  
(403) 843-2030  
rfcss@telusplanet.net

**St. Albert Community Information and Volunteer Centre**

10—215 Carnegie Drive  
St. Albert, AB T8N 5B1  
(780) 459-6666  
**www.st-albert.info**

**Information and Volunteer Centre for Strathcona County**

100 Ordze Avenue  
Sherwood Park , AB T8B 1M6  
(780) 464-4242  
ivc@shaw.ca  
**www.ivcstrathcona.org**

**Stettler & District Volunteer Centre**

Box 2097  
Stettler, AB T0C 2L0  
(403) 742-1155  
sircst@telusplanet.net  
**www.stettlervolunteer.com**

**Stony Plain Volunteer Centre**

4905—51 Avenue  
Stony Plain, AB T7Z 1Y1  
(780) 963-8583  
pfcss@stonyplain.com  
**www.stonyplain.com/fcss**

**Sylvan Lake Volunteer Centre**

4926—50 Avenue  
Sylvan Lake, AB T4S 1A1  
(403) 887-1137  
volunteer@sylvanlake.ca  
**www.town.sylvan-lake.ab.ca/volunteers.htm** (note: needs the .htm to work)

**Vegreville Volunteer Action Centre**  
4829—50 St. (Box 640)  
Lower Level, Town of  
Vegreville Administration  
Building  
Vegreville AB T9C 1R7  
(780) 632-3966  
volunteers@vegreville.com  
[www.volunteervegreville.ca](http://www.volunteervegreville.ca)

**Volunteer Alberta**  
217, 10113—104 Street  
Edmonton, AB T5J 1A1  
(780) 482-3300 OR 1-877-915-  
6336 (toll-free within Alberta)  
volab@volunteeralberta.ca  
[www.volunteeralberta.ab.ca](http://www.volunteeralberta.ab.ca)

**Wood Buffalo Volunteer and Information Centre**  
PO Box 6183, Stn Main  
Fort McMurray, AB  
T9H 4W1

## **Alberta Career Information Hotline**

Do you need help with career planning, educational planning, or job search skills? Contact the Career Information Hotline at:

Phone: 1-800-661-3753 throughout Alberta or  
(780) 422-4266 in Edmonton.



Deaf or hard of hearing callers with TDD units call  
(780) 422-5283 in Edmonton or 1-800-232-7215  
toll-free for message relay service.

Website: [www.alis.gov.ab.ca/hotline](http://www.alis.gov.ab.ca/hotline)

Fax: (780) 422-0372

E-mail: [hotline@alis.gov.ab.ca](mailto:hotline@alis.gov.ab.ca)

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Alberta Human Resources and Employment

**Mail:** 12<sup>th</sup> Floor, South Tower, Capital Health Centre,  
10030-107 Street, Edmonton, AB T5J 3E4

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**Fax:** (780) 422-5319

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