

# GROUP VOLUNTEERING

KEY RESOURCES  
FOR GROUPS WANTING TO VOLUNTEER



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# 1 *What is Group Volunteering?*

## A DEFINITION

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.

### 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 in a shelter, a senior residence, or a house charity for children or families
- cooking or delivering hot meals to clients needing support services
- 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
- preparing baskets for adolescent mothers
- teaching computer skills to seniors or children
- wrapping gifts for children for the holidays
- preparing Christmas baskets
- preparing back-to-school bags for children
- supervising or leading activities for children, adolescents, families, or seniors
- sorting food, toys, clothes, supplies or materials
- painting or cleaning-up shelters or senior residences
- teaching computer skills to seniors or children
- 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 organizing legal clinics, gardeners helping in senior's residences or shelters.



### Suggestions for where to start:

- contact your local volunteer centre;
- look for events held by local non-profit organizations, charities, and schools;
- or 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.

## B WEB RESOURCES

<http://www.coyotecomunications.com/volunteer/groups.shtml>

[http://www.givingandvolunteering.ca/files/giving/en/reports/understanding\\_volunteers.pdf](http://www.givingandvolunteering.ca/files/giving/en/reports/understanding_volunteers.pdf)

[http://www.volunteernwt.ca/resources/resource\\_manuals/Book%201%20Understand-final.pdf](http://www.volunteernwt.ca/resources/resource_manuals/Book%201%20Understand-final.pdf)

<http://www.handsonnetwork.org/nationalprograms/neighboring>

[Creating group projects](#)

[Group Volunteering – Team Leader Handbook](#)

[Creating opportunities to serve](#)

## C BOOKS

Make a Difference: America's guide to volunteering and community service, by Arthur I. Blaustein. Published by Jossey-Bass, 2003. The Challenge of community service.

Leadership in Volunteer Groups: The essential guide for leadership & organization within any volunteer group, by Robert C. Tretter.

They will know us by our love: Service ideas for small groups. By Group Publishing Inc., 2007. Serving your community.





## 2 *Making a difference*

Volunteering as an individual or in a group is a great way to have an impact in your community. By offering your time, energy, ideas, creativity, and compassion, you are able to make a difference in the lives of individuals or the overall quality of life in the community.

**A IMPORTANCE OF VOLUNTEERING:** Volunteering is a two-way street. Of course, specific individuals and society as a whole benefit from this type of involvement. But as a volunteer, you also can benefit in various ways, from acquiring specific skills or knowledge, to gaining confidence, to feeling better both physically and psychologically. When people volunteer together, there are additional benefits related to their group's cohesiveness. Finally, citizens who are actively engaged in their communities contribute to the overall health of our society.

**B YOUR COMMUNITY NEEDS YOU:** By supporting community organizations, volunteers help to meet community needs and can help identify problems and seek solutions.

### **Some community needs that volunteering helps meet:**

- **Poverty and homelessness:** by volunteering at a local food bank or homeless shelter, you help alleviate suffering on an immediate basis, but you can also put your energy towards improving the situation. The first step is to understand the social problem and practical experience is a great teacher.
- **Health and safety needs:** volunteers can participate in cleaning up or renovating playgrounds, alleyways, and parks, thereby improving the quality of life for everyone who lives in the neighbourhood. If you plant trees, you are contributing both ecologically and aesthetically to the broader community.
- **Isolation of seniors:** volunteers who prepare and deliver hot meals to their fellow citizens living with a loss of autonomy help to not only take care of the nutritional needs of the beneficiaries, but also provide much-needed human contact.

**C GET INVOLVED IN YOUR COMMUNITY:** You are part of your community. Volunteering is one of the ways you can improve the quality of life in the short term and have a stake in how your community evolves.



# 3 *Finding activities for groups*

**A WHAT KIND OF ACTIVITIES DO YOU ENJOY?** Working with children, cooking, baking, serving meals, helping seniors, gardening, sorting items, organizing or animating activities for seniors or children, cleaning up, working in an environmental project, helping to run a festival?

**B WHEN WOULD YOU LIKE TO VOLUNTEER?** Once a week, once a year, half a day, a short-term activity, in the evenings, on weekends, after working hours, periodically, seasonally?

## **OCCASIONAL**

Friends, family, colleagues or acquaintances

Opportunities that are 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.

**C CREATE A PROJECT:** one way to volunteer as a group is to create a project that suits the needs of a particular organization. Thus, both parties can combine their availability and create a specific activity.

**D FINDING THE RIGHT PROJECT:** be open to new experiences: adventure, human connection, spiritual growth, maturing, and learning. Request help from volunteer centers to find opportunities. Do your research. Discuss your project with family, friends, colleagues and community members.



# 4 *Making it work for your group*

## A CHOOSE A TEAM LEADER:

- Someone in the group needs to be responsible for filling out application forms, and act as the primary group contact and deliverer of information. The organization may ask this person to complete a Waiver of Liability form.
- The group leader should receive all communications on behalf of the group regarding volunteering, and he or she is responsible for communicating with all group members. This individual also attends any orientations sessions required before volunteering, and communicates information from this orientation to other members.

## B GET INVOLVED WITH THE MEMBERS OF YOUR GROUP, AND CHOOSE THE VOLUNTEER ACTIVITY:

- Survey your group members and their interests. This will help you choose a suitable volunteer activity, and ensure that everyone has a positive experience in which their expectations are met.

The hardest part is finding an appropriate group volunteering activity. To get started:

- contact your local volunteer center;
- check on-line matching programs;
- contact local schools (schools boards usually list schools on their websites);
- look for events held by local non-profit organizations;
- ask group members to contact non-profit organizations that work on a cause that interests them or where they know someone, to ask about potential group volunteering activities.

### Web resources:

<http://www.idealists.org/> connects people, organizations, and resources. This site compiles resources on local and global volunteering

<http://www.volunteermatch.org/> provides volunteer opportunities

[Volunteer Canada](#) lists volunteer centres across the country and also has resources for family volunteering and corporate volunteering

<http://www.getvolunteering.ca/> Manulife Financial has partnered with Volunteer Canada and Getinvolved to help volunteers and organizations connect



<http://www.fcabq.org/> lists volunteer centres across Canada

<http://www.volunteerottawa.ca/vo-clean/index.php?eng> provides information about Volunteer Ottawa's corporate volunteer program

[http://www.volunteercalgary.ab.ca/programs/employee\\_volunteering.aspx](http://www.volunteercalgary.ab.ca/programs/employee_volunteering.aspx) provides information about Volunteer Calgary's corporate volunteer program

<http://www.volunteertoronto.ca/corporations/> provides information about Volunteer Toronto's corporate volunteer program

<http://cabm.net/en/groupvolunteering/groups> The Volunteer Bureau of Montreal works with groups of volunteers from corporations, schools, or other organizations interested in getting involved in the Montreal community

## C CONTACT THE ORGANIZATION

Once you have identified potential volunteering activities, you should contact potential hosting organizations. Be sure to ask the following:

- Has the organization involved a group of volunteers in the past? Enquire about their experience.
- Are there growth opportunities available for group of volunteers volunteering with the organization?
- What dates and times will volunteers need to be there?
- Where should volunteers go when they arrive?
- Are there age restrictions for volunteer activities?
- Is parking available?
- What tools and resources will be provided, and what are volunteers expected to bring?
- What food and drinks will be provided, and what are the volunteers expected to bring?
- How should volunteers dress?
- Is there any other pertinent information the volunteers should know (about the clientele, for example or about activities that are taking place while the group will be there)?

## D THE BIG DAY

- be on time
- confirm responsibilities and commitments with organizers

