

10 TIPS ON BECOMING A GREAT VOLUNTEER

1. Research the causes or issues that are important to you. Look for a group that deals with issues about which you feel strongly.
2. Leverage your strengths. If you enjoy outdoor work or have a knack for teaching, you may want to look for a volunteer opportunity to utilize your unique skills. Similarly, you may want to think about your specific personality and how your organizational skills or communication style might fit with different organizations or activities.
3. Think outside the box! Many community groups looking for volunteers, like neighborhood watch programs, prisons, disaster relief organizations, youth organizations, intergenerational programs, and park services, may not have occurred to you but could just be the perfect fit.
4. Don't wait to be asked. There are many ways to find organizations that are looking for volunteers. Ask your friends or colleagues about their own volunteering activities. The Internet has excellent online volunteer referral services, including www.volunteer.gov. Or try visiting your local city/town hall. These services can help you to find the right volunteer opportunity for you.
5. Request an informational interview and plan for it in much the same way you would prepare for a job interview. Be ready to describe your interests, qualifications, and background, and also be prepared to ask your interviewers about their organization and the benefits they offer to their volunteers. An interview will allow you and the organization to find the right match for your skills and interests.
6. Would you like to learn something new? Consider whether the organization offers training or professional development opportunities for their volunteers. Volunteering can provide you with the chance to learn about something you're interested in and develop skills in a new area.
7. Find the volunteer activity that aligns with your schedule. Organizations need different levels of commitment for different types of volunteer activities. Serving as a mentor, for example, will require a regular, intensive commitment, while volunteering for a walk-a-thon is a seasonal commitment.
8. Volunteer with friends or as a family. Think about looking for a volunteer opportunity that would be suitable for parents and children to do together or for you and your spouse. Volunteering with others can be a great way to get to know people better and help keep you excited about service.
9. Volunteer virtually, yes, there is such a thing. If you have computer access and the necessary skills, some organizations now offer the opportunity to do volunteer work over the computer. This can be a great way to get started in volunteering and provide a way to volunteer at home on a flexible schedule.
10. Don't give up! If you find that your volunteering experience is not all that you expected, talk to your volunteer supervisor or coordinator about it. Think of what could make it better and check with them to see if your ideas are possibilities.