

## Chapter 12 Volunteering

### Learning Objectives

After carefully reading this chapter, and completing the exercise within it, you should be able to:

- Recognize that volunteering can enhance career development
- Identify skills associated with volunteering
- Develop a Volunteer Action Plan to engage with your next volunteer experience

### Introduction

Volunteering has many benefits to you and your community. Most likely you have already volunteered your time and helped others on many occasions and in many different ways. What you may not be aware of, are the many skills that you develop while you are volunteering. This chapter will give you an overview of the what, why and how to volunteer. It will also provide a list of skills you can develop but it will be your responsibility to prioritize the skills that you would like to develop. Finally, the chapter concludes with an activity that allows you to create a Volunteer Activity Plan for engaging in your next volunteer experience. Let's get started.

### What is volunteering?

Volunteering can be broken down into two categories, managed and unmanaged. As Dingle, Sokolowski, Saxon-Harold, Smith & Leigh (2001) explain, managed volunteering takes place in public, private and not for profit organizations while unmanaged volunteering is spontaneous and sporadic help-between members of the public or family and friends. This chapter will focus more on managed volunteer experiences and more specifically within non-profit organizations. This should not take away from your efforts in seeking out unmanaged volunteering experiences in your community.

Volunteering has been defined as, "unpaid help, in the form of time, service or skills, through an organisation or group, and carried out willingly without coercion" (Oppenheimer, 2008, p. 6). It is really about you going out and helping at a not for profit organization. See Appendix 12.1 for a list of community organisations that you may be able to volunteer with in your community.

Communities rely on volunteers to serve and help. Canadians volunteer over 1.9 billion hours a year which is significant (Statistics Canada, 2013). The Conference Board of Canada (2018), estimates that volunteering would add nearly 56 billion dollars to Canada’s GDP in 2017 alone, which would account for 2.6% of Canada’s economic activity. This truly shows the impact of volunteering, but why is it that people give their time to help out in their communities? Let’s explore some reasons why so many Canadians volunteer.

## Why Volunteer?

There are multiple reasons why people volunteer. Some people volunteer solely to benefit other people or a cause, and this is known as altruism. Others volunteer to meet people, socialize and feel good about doing something good for their community, which may be done for personal wellbeing. A practical reason to volunteer is to gain valuable skills to use both personally and professionally towards your career development. Table 12.1 created by Smith, Holmes, Haski-Leventhal, Cnaan, Handy, & Brudney (2010), outlines the top motivations why students volunteer. The following sections will elaborate upon these and other reasons to get out there and volunteer.

	<b>Motivational item</b>	<b>Regular volunteers</b>	<b>Occasional volunteers</b>	<b>Non-volunteers</b>
Instrumental/ Career-related	To put on CV (resumé) when applying for a job **	61.5%	65.1%	70.6%
	To put on CV (resumé) for admission to higher education **	58.0%	61.5%	67.0%
	To make new contacts that might help a business career **	57.7%	56.5%	62.0%
	To help one get a foot in the door for paid employment N.S.	58.2%	57.6%	60.7%
Altruistic/ Value-driven	It is important to help others **	90.2%	85.7%	79.2%
	To work for a cause that is important **	87.8%	84.0%	78.3%
	Makes one feel better *	75.4%	71.6%	68.0%
	Volunteering gives one a new perspective **	79.0%	72.9%	64.3%
	To learn about the cause **	63.7%	57.1%	55.9%

† Volunteers: Why do you volunteer? Non-Volunteers: Why do you think people volunteer? Percentage of respondents strongly agreeing or agreeing.

\*\* Significant at the 0.01 level. \* Significant at the 0.05 level N.S. Not significant

Table 12.1 Motivations to Volunteer. Used under [CC BY 3.0](#) / Part of original table removed

## Altruism and Empathy

Altruism is a commendable reason to volunteer with organizations. “Altruism refers to helping others when there is little or no perceived potential for a direct, explicit reward to the self” (Carlo, Hausmann,

Christiansen & Randall, 2003, p. 113). The primary focus is on the 'other' whether it be human, animal or a social cause. As shown in Table 12.1, the number one motivation for students to volunteer was to "help others". This is a true altruistic endeavor, but it does not mean that it is the only reason to volunteer. Let's now look at increasing our wellbeing as a motivation for volunteering.

### Personal Wellbeing

Research has shown that prosocial activities, including volunteering, contribute to the constructs found within wellbeing (Li & Ferraro, 2005; Thoits & Hewitt, 2001). Volunteer experiences offer a space for you to develop your wellbeing but this can be different for each individual, as personal wellbeing means different things to different people. Thoits & Hewitt (2001), found that volunteering enhances wellbeing in six areas including, happiness, life satisfaction, self-esteem, sense of control over life, physical health and depression. This would seem like a valid reason to volunteer, but be aware that taking on too many responsibilities, including volunteering, can cause you to become over extended, which can actually lead to being unwell. So, if you can enhance your wellbeing while volunteering, what else can you gain while helping in your community? Let's take a look at developing new skills while volunteering.

### Skill Development

Altruism and enhancing your wellbeing are compelling reasons to volunteer, but focusing on skill development can lead to learning that will transcend other areas in your life. It can be as easy as picking a skill and intentionally focussing on developing that skill while you are volunteering. For example, maybe you want to focus on teamwork. While volunteering you may want to ask questions to some of the team members, about how they work together or whether they follow a theory or philosophy of teamwork. You may want to think about how ideas around teamwork differs or is similar to how you work as part of a team. These are only examples, but the most important aspect of skill development is being intentional about a skill and focussing on it throughout your experience. There are many skills you can develop and table 12.2 below, recommends 19 skills that young people reported developing while volunteering (Oldfield, 2006). Take a look and see what skills you might develop during your next volunteer experience.

Skills Developed while Volunteering	
The following skills were identified when volunteering:	
Confidence	Improving learning
Communication	Taking responsibility
Teamwork	Decision-making
Managing relationships	Understanding diversity
Understanding society	Self-awareness
Self-management	Problem-solving
Preparation for work	Rights and responsibilities
Active listening	Planning
Leadership	Negotiation
	Budgeting

Table 12.2 Skills Developed while Volunteering

Another useful skill to develop while out volunteering is networking. Networking can be defined as a “goal-directed behavior which occurs both inside and outside of an organization, focussed on creating, cultivating, and utilizing interpersonal relationships” (Gibson, Hardy & Buckley, 2014, p. 146). When volunteering, you have the opportunity to create relationships with other volunteers. You most likely already have a commonality with those people in that you are volunteering for the same organization. You never know who you are volunteering with; they could be your next employer or somebody that can write you a valuable reference letter. Be aware of who you are volunteering with but don’t be presumptuous with what you want. It takes time to build relationships.

Now that you have at least three reasons to volunteer, let’s look at how to find that next volunteer experience.

[How to Volunteer?](#)

The following section will not only help you find that right volunteer experience, but will also help you get the most out of your experience. After reading this section check out the Volunteer Activity Plan that will help you during your volunteer experience.

## Finding the right Experience

The following is a quick guide, to help you find your next volunteer experience:

1. Find a volunteer organization with which you share common interests

It's important to think about the skills you already possess and your interests in order to find an appropriate organization. This will keep you engaged and wanting to continue your work with the organization. For example, if you are interested in animals you may want to contact the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA).

2. Look online or talk with friends and family to find opportunities

You will find many volunteer opportunities online, such as, Volunteer Canada <https://volunteer.ca/> or check with your local volunteer centre that can be found in most communities. Also, check with family and friends about any opportunities they may know about in your community. See Appendix 12.1 for a list of community organisations that you may be able to volunteer with in your community.

3. Pick an organization that will help you to develop new skills

You may bring many skills to an organization but be mindful of the skills that you may be able to develop. Many organizations offer training and professional development for their volunteers.

4. Manage your time

It is very important that you are able to manage all of the responsibilities in your life. Although volunteer work is unpaid, consider it similar to a job or class, requiring the same commitments. Volunteer organizations rely heavily on their volunteers. Be realistic about how much time you have to volunteer and try not to overcommit.

5. Training and Criminal Record Checks

Some volunteer organizations will offer on-site training. Be sure to take part in any needed training and be willing to take more training if needed. You may also be able to gain certification for certain training. This will help build your skills and develop your resume.

Some organizations will request a criminal record check before you can volunteer. This is normally done if you are working with "at-risk" populations, including children and/or vulnerable adults. In Canada, every province is different, so be sure to look into this well in advance as some criminal record checks can take several weeks to complete. There may also be a fee associated with criminal record checks and some volunteer organizations will pay the fee for you. Be sure to find this out before you start the criminal record check process.

## Getting the most from your Experience

Once you have found an organization that interests you, follow these steps to get the most from your experience:

### 1. Contact the organization

The first contact with a volunteer organization is very important. It is a time to ask any questions you may have, but also a time for the organization to find out about you. Some organizations expect you to contact them in person, by phone or email while other organizations will have you fill out a questionnaire. Each organization is different but don't hesitate to contact as many organizations until you find the right fit.

### 2. Expectations

Every volunteer experience will be different, but if you treat volunteering like a job or class, you will have more success. Always ask what is expected of you and be sure to communicate what you can offer the organization in terms of time and resources. Communication is key when working with organizations as they rely on you to be a committed member of their team.

### 3. On the day

Be on time! If for some reason you are unable to volunteer, be sure to contact your volunteer co-ordinator or supervisor in advance and let them know. They are relying on you to help on the day. When volunteering, if you don't know something, ask for help. And finally, have fun and remember to focus on those skills and network!

### 4. Receiving feedback

It's really important to ask your volunteer co-ordinator or supervisor for any feedback they have about your involvement. This will help you the next time you are volunteering. It is also important to take some time and reflect about your experience, which will be discussed in the next section.

## Taking your Volunteer Experience to the next level through Reflection

The following section will outline the use of reflective practice to be used alongside your volunteering experience. Reflection accentuates your experiences and allows for more meaningful learning to take place. Let's see how reflection can become part of your next volunteer experience.

### What is Reflection?

As one of the pioneers of reflective pedagogy, John Dewey (1933), defined reflection as, "active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the

grounds that support it and the further conclusion to which it tends" (p.9). In your volunteer experience, this means being intentional about the skills you are developing and reflecting upon your experience once you are done. This process is what David Kolb (1984) developed and named the cycle for experiential learning as outlined in Figure 12.1.

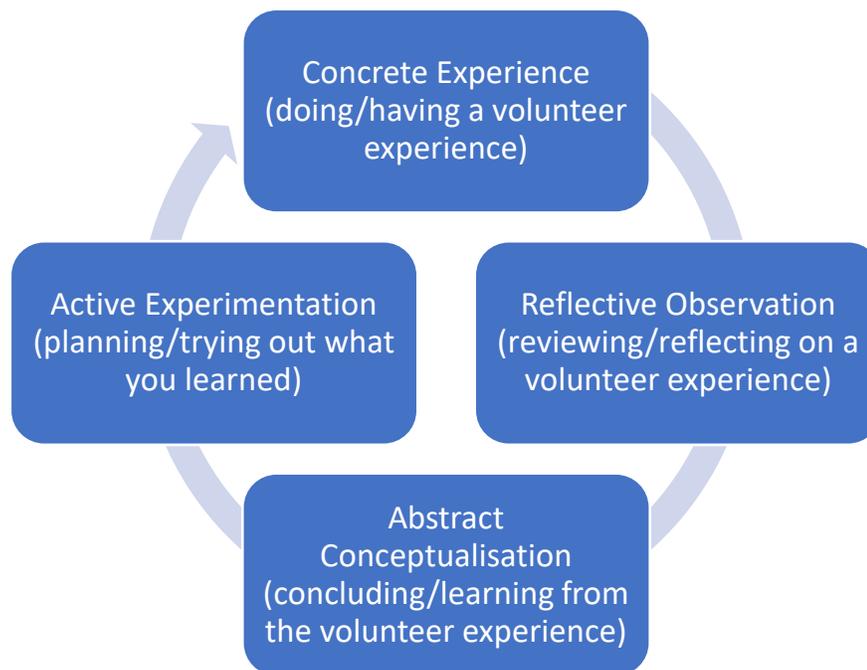


Figure 12.1. Based upon Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle, 1984 and Lewin's Experiential Learning Model, 1951

When the experiential cycle is modeled through a volunteer experience, the concrete experience is the actual volunteer experience. As you move into reflective observation, this is when you need to be reflective about your experience. Reflection is not about describing your experience, but more about unpacking the learning that came from the experience. It's engaging with the sensory experiences that come from volunteering or asking critical questions about your experience. Check out Section 3 of the Volunteer Action Plan for example reflection questions. The next stage in the model is abstract conceptualization; this is the new learning that takes place through your reflective practice, which can include new skills, ideas or concepts. This is why it is imperative that you are intentional about the skills you are developing. The final stage is active experimentation whereby you take your new learning and adapt it to a new experience. This may be taking a new skill you learned and transferring that skill to your classes, work, or your next volunteer experience. The cycle continues and can be used with any

experiential learning opportunities. Reflection is truly where your learning comes full circle. Let's now look at how you can take all of this information and create a plan for your next volunteer experience.

## Volunteer Action Plan

The Volunteer Action Plan provided below is meant to be used before, during and after your volunteer experience. Section 1 outlines the demographic information that may be needed-when selecting a volunteer experience, including, when, where and who you are volunteering with. It will allow you to keep track of any email addresses or phone numbers you may need.

Section 2 outlines the reasons you are volunteering and any skills you would like to develop while engaging in your experience. This is where you need to be intentional about the learning that can take place. This may change once you are involved in your volunteer experience as you may not be able to work on a skill that you have outlined, and the experience may not accommodate that learning at that time. So be flexible, and choose another skill that may be more appropriate.

Section 3 is meant to be completed after your experience. This is the descriptive and reflective component to your plan. Take a bit of time and describe your experience, what were some of your duties and what did you accomplish? Finally, answer any of the reflective questions provided. This is such an important step in your learning. Get to the heart of the learning that has taken place and be sure to be reflective.

## Volunteer Action Plan

### Section 1

Name:

Date:

Organization:

Organization contact name:

Organization contact phone and email:

Number of hours volunteered:

### Section 2

Define the skills to be developed (choose one or two from the following list or come up with your own)

*(Confidence, Communication, Teamwork, Managing relationships, Understanding society, Self-management, Preparation for work, Active listening, Leadership, Improving learning, Taking responsibility, Decision-making, Understanding diversity, Self-awareness, Problem-solving, Rights and responsibilities, Planning, Negotiation, Budgeting)*

1.

2.

The reasons I am volunteering are:

1.

2.

Description of volunteer activities/duties:



## Conclusion

Well done, you made it to the end and now have a better understanding of volunteering and its many components. The previous sections have taken you from the beginning of understanding volunteerism right through to finding an opportunity, creating a Volunteer Action Plan and finally reflecting upon your experiences. It's now up to you, to take this information and put it into action. Go out and find that opportunity to help your community and build those valuable skills that you can use in your life.

## Appendix 12.1 Places to volunteer in your community

These are only examples of places to volunteer but do belong in many communities:

- Local School
- Local Church
- Seniors Home
- Daycare
- Food Bank
- United Way
- Rotary or other service group
- Salvation Army
- Red Cross
- Immigrant Services

Online sites to consider:

- Volunteer Canada <https://volunteer.ca/>
- Volunteer British Columbia <https://volunteerbc.bc.ca/>
- Canada Service Corps <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/services/canada-service-corps.html>
- For a fun quiz, to find out what type of volunteer you are, check out <https://volunteer.ca/english/index.html>

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