

# Identify Volunteer Opportunities Across the Life Span

**A** **VOLUNTEER** is someone who, without payment, works for the benefit of others or of a project. Volunteers may provide a service to the community or may work for the advancement of a cause, such as protecting the environment. Volunteer opportunities exist for people of all ages. In this unit, you will learn about the different types of volunteer work and how people can find the opportunities that are right for them.



## Objectives:



1. Describe reasons for volunteering.
2. Identify opportunities for volunteer experiences.

## Key Terms:



charity

community service

generic volunteers

philanthropist

service learning

skilled volunteer

stakeholders

virtual volunteer

volunteer

volunteerism

youth service

## Reasons for Volunteerism

**Volunteerism** is the practice of doing volunteer work in programs for the community, for education, or for the environment. Volunteer work often benefits a **charity**—an organization that collects money and recruits volunteers to help its stakeholders. **Stakeholders** are those individuals or groups that receive a direct benefit from the service being provided.

There are many reasons for volunteerism. Some individuals may choose to volunteer to provide a needed service or skill. Others volunteer to learn a skill, and some people simply enjoy a feeling of purpose when they volunteer.

## VOLUNTEER TYPES

### Skilled Volunteer

A **skilled volunteer** is a volunteer who brings professional and/or technical skills to a project. Examples of skilled volunteers include health professionals who volunteer on emergency response teams and carpenters or electricians who volunteer for Habitat for Humanity projects. Another example of a skilled helper is a **virtual volunteer**, which is a volunteer who works on tasks for an organization via the Internet or computer.



**FIGURE 1.** Carpenters are skilled volunteers who may be found at a Habitat for Humanity work site.

### Generic Volunteer

Most people would be considered **generic volunteers**—volunteers without specific skills who may or may not need training. Workers who volunteer at community fundraisers or local sporting events would be considered generic volunteers.

Some people may choose to volunteer to learn a new skill or to gain experience. For example, a college student studying early childhood education may volunteer in a preschool to gain experience working with children. Others volunteer to promote their own academic success. Studies indicate that students who participate in service-learning projects are likely to attain a higher grade point average than those who do not volunteer.

## SERVICE TYPES

### Service Learning

Some high schools require students to participate in service learning to graduate. **Service learning** is volunteer work that contributes to academic learning. Students must demonstrate how their volunteer work contributes to their education. In addition, some college admissions boards now require and review volunteer service on student applications. Volunteer work also

can be listed as work experience on a resume, especially when young adults are looking for their first jobs.

## Community Service

**Community service** is work on projects designed to benefit the community rather than the individuals or groups involved in the projects. Examples of community-service activities include answering phones at a telethon or cleaning up a neighborhood playground. Another type of community service is **youth service**—willing service through a youth organization, such as Scouts or Key Club. Community service may be required as part of a court sentence.



FIGURE 2. Picking up litter can be a community-service project.

## Philanthropists

A **philanthropist** is an individual who promotes human welfare through gifts or acts of charity to improve the lives of others. Bill and Melinda Gates are examples of philanthropists. Their organization, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, works with several school districts to improve the technological applications available to students. In addition, the foundation has allocated billions of dollars to charities that help people around the world receive clean water and necessary medical supplies.

## Volunteer Opportunities

When people are interested in becoming volunteers, they should first research different agencies to find the opportunity that is right for them. Potential volunteers should tour the agency and talk to paid and volunteer staff. People can learn more about the agency by researching its mission statement and reading the volunteer job description.

Before making a choice, potential volunteers should identify the length of commitment required as well as any available training opportunities. Potential volunteers may be required to complete an interview process, much like they would when applying for a job.

Individuals should consider their personality types when choosing volunteer opportunities. Some people enjoy working with children or older adults, but others prefer to do manual work with less social interaction.

One way in which people can learn more about their own personalities is to take the Carl Jung and Isabel Myers-Briggs personality test. The Jung Typology Test is available at



## FURTHER EXPLORATION...

### ONLINE CONNECTION: Volunteer Vacations

One way for individuals or families to get involved in a cause is to take a volunteer vacation. It is a popular way to travel and volunteer on a budget. The opportunity allows volunteers to help others and to learn more about themselves and other cultures.

Visit the following Web site to learn more about the opportunities available for volunteer vacations. Research at least three different vacation options, and compare the time commitment and expense required as well as the benefits, such as learning new skills and gaining experience.

<http://www.charityguide.org/volunteer/vacation/topic/environmental-protection.htm>

<http://humanmetrics.com>. The test has 72 questions and takes about 10 minutes to complete. The test uses four continuums to classify personality types:

- ◆ Extroversion or introversion
- ◆ Sensing or intuition
- ◆ Thinking or feeling
- ◆ Judging or perceiving

The Web site provides information on the 16 personality types, including a written description of each type and a list of famous people with the same personality type. It suggests suitable career choices for each type and provides information on institutions that provide career training or advanced degrees in those areas.

Volunteerism provides advantages throughout life. Some opportunities involve the whole family. Adults with children are more likely to volunteer than adults without children. A child's value system is strengthened when the child views one or both parents volunteering. Research shows that teenagers who volunteer are more likely to volunteer as adults. Approximately 30 percent of older adults volunteer in their community. Older adults who volunteer are healthier than their peers who do not volunteer.

### Summary:



Volunteers may provide service to the community or may work for the advancement of a cause, such as protecting the environment. Some individuals may choose to volunteer to provide a needed service or skill. Others volunteer to learn a skill, and some people simply enjoy a feeling of purpose when they volunteer. Potential volunteers should first research different agencies to find the opportunity that is right for them.

## Checking Your Knowledge:

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1. What are the different types of volunteers?
2. What are some examples of community service?
3. What are some reasons for students to volunteer?
4. What should people do before choosing a volunteer opportunity?
5. What are the four continuums the Jung Typography Test uses to classify personality types?

## Expanding Your Knowledge:

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Contact a representative from a volunteer organization in your area. Be prepared to ask questions to learn more about the skills and training required for different volunteer opportunities. Ask how many people volunteer at the organization and how long volunteers typically stay. Are there opportunities for families as well as for older adults?

## Web Links:

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### How to Go Green: Volunteerism

<http://planetgreen.discovery.com/go-green/green-volunteering/>

### The Volunteer Family

<http://www.volunteerfamily.org/>

### Voluntarism Among Older Adults

[http://agingandwork.bc.edu/documents/FS03\\_VoluntarismAmgOlder\\_003.pdf](http://agingandwork.bc.edu/documents/FS03_VoluntarismAmgOlder_003.pdf)