

# Before Volunteering...

## **THINK ABOUT...**

### **YOUR LIFESTYLE**

How much time do you have to give to volunteering? Would you like to volunteer with other people or by yourself? Do you have reliable transportation? Are you volunteering with a friend? Do you prefer a short or long-term commitment?

### **YOUR BELIEFS AND VALUES**

What kind of group do you want to help? Are there any problems you would like to solve or prevent? Are there situations that you wish to avoid because you may feel uncomfortable? Are there personal issues that would prevent you from performing certain tasks?

### **YOUR INTERESTS AND SKILLS**

What abilities do you have that would be valuable to others? Do you want to do physical work or would you rather help with ideas? What are you interested in?

### **YOUR GOALS**

What do you want to get out of volunteering? Would you like to develop a particular skill or explore career options? Do you want something to beef up your resume? Do you want to help individuals or groups? What would you consider a "successful" volunteer?

### **YOUR LIMITS**

How many other commitments and responsibilities do you currently have? Will you continue volunteering during the school year or just over breaks? Are your grades what you want them to be? Will you have enough personal time to devote to a particular volunteer opportunity?



# Finding Volunteer Work

Looking for volunteer work that will meet your needs and interests can require research. Here are some ways you can start searching:

## Family and Friends

Family and friends may have good contacts or know others who volunteer. They are often your best leads to an opportunity. Let everyone you talk to know that you're looking for a volunteer opportunity.

## Volunteer Centres

The Community Sector Council posts volunteer opportunities at its virtual resource centre for the voluntary sector, [communitysector.nl.ca](http://communitysector.nl.ca). Search for opportunities in your region or community. Student opportunities are flagged with a red circle.

## Schools and Other Educational Institutions

Teacher and guidance/career counselors can help you identify skills and find suitable volunteer placements.

## Newspapers, Community TV and Radio Stations

The media regularly devote space to the activities of charitable organizations and their volunteer opportunities. Read the paper and find out when radio stations broadcast their local calendar of events. Community channels are also a great way to learn more about what is happening with voluntary, community-based organizations.

## The Internet

The internet provides a wealth of information about volunteer opportunities. Start by searching your favorite organization or cause. If you don't have access to the internet, the local library, your school, community centre, volunteer centre or cyber café offer access. Don't forget [www.communitysector.nl.ca](http://www.communitysector.nl.ca) for some volunteer postings in Newfoundland and Labrador.



# Agency Questions

Organizations want to ensure you are a good match for a particular volunteer position and the organization as a whole. For liability reasons as well, it is important they get to know you by meeting with you and potentially doing reference and background checks.

Questions you can expect to be asked include:

- How did you find out about this volunteer opportunity?
- Have you volunteered before?
- Why are you interested in volunteerism?
- What is the biggest reason you have chosen to volunteer with this organization?
- What would you like to get out of this volunteer experience?
- What are your interests?
- Which of your skills do you think will contribute the most to our organization?
- What motivates you to put forth your greatest effort?
- What kind of work environment are you most comfortable with?
- How long do you think you would like to be a volunteer?
- Do you have any special needs?
- Are you prepared to attend an orientation session and/or training?
- Are you willing to undergo screening and background checks?



# Your Questions

**Before committing to a volunteer position, you should gain an understanding about the organization, your duties and volunteer policies.**

**Questions to ask include:**

- What is the organization's mission?
- What volunteer work will I be doing?
- What are the opportunities for advancement or variety in my work?
- May I see a written job description for my volunteer work?
- What is the required time commitment of my volunteer position?
- How will my volunteer work help fulfill your organizations' objectives?
- What skills will I be able to use and develop?
- Do I have a trial or probationary period and if so, how long is it?
- Who will be my supervisor?
- What kind of environment will I be working in?
- Who will I be working with?
- Do you provide written evaluations and references for volunteers?
- How many volunteers are involved in this organization/program?
- Does the volunteer position I am interested in require background checks?



# Making a Commitment

"You are more trouble than you are worth", Linus to Lucy.

One of the most common complaints about volunteers is their unreliability. Unfortunately this complaint is based on fact, as many volunteers fail to keep their commitments.

In many cases, they do this because they agree to take on a task without fully considering all the ramifications involved, such as what is expected of them and how it relates to their other responsibilities.

Before you commit yourself to any type of volunteer service you should think things over carefully. Changing your mind later could create serious problems for the organization and other volunteers.

## *CONSIDER THE FOLLOWING:*

THE POSITION DESCRIPTION - what is expected of you?

YOUR VALUES, ETHICS AND GOALS - are they the same as the organization's?

IF YOUR CONTRIBUTION WILL BE MEANINGFUL TO YOU

IF YOUR OBJECTIVES IN VOLUNTEERING WILL BE MET

HOME AND SCHOOL COMMITMENTS - not just now, but future ones too

TRAVEL TIMES AND METHODS - do you have consistent transportation?

THE ACTUAL TIME YOU HAVE AVAILABLE - are you over committing?

POTENTIAL OTHER COSTS



# Responsibilities

You should treat volunteer work as you would paid work.  
As a volunteer you have the following responsibilities...

- Be **sincere** in your offering of volunteer services.
- Believe in and respect the **objectives** of the organization.
- Comply with **screening** policies of the organization.
- Understand the organization's **policies** and **structure**.
- Accept tasks that fit your **skills** and **interests**.
- Take advantage of **training** opportunities.
- Clearly understand what is **expected** of you.
- Carry out duties **efficiently** and **honestly**.
- Observe the rules of **confidentiality**.
- Accept **feedback** and **direction** from your supervisor.
- Be **accountable** for your actions.
- Suggest changes or **improvements**.
- Be up front about **feelings** of satisfaction and discontentment.
- Be **dependable**. Call (and not at the last minute) if you are unable to fulfill a commitment. Don't let this happen unless it is unavoidable.



Always give 100% and you will get  that much more in return!

# Volunteer Rights

Just because you are not getting paid to work in a volunteer position doesn't mean it cannot be an enriching experience both personally and professionally. As a volunteer you have the right to...

- A job that **corresponds** to your **interests** and expectations
- Be assigned tasks **suitable** to your **capabilities**
- Clear and **comprehensive description** of your duties, responsibilities and benefits of your volunteer position
- Appropriate **guidance** from your supervisor
- Be **provided with information** about the organization's structure, policies, procedures, mandate, etc.
- A suitable **workplace** and the necessary **resources** to carry out your duties
- Receive **feedback** on your performance
- An opportunity to **make suggestions** and improvements
- Receive **training** and advice suitable to your advancement
- Be **thanked** for your contributions

