



Frequently Asked Questions About Volunteering with Partner Agencies of Volunteer.gov

1. **How do I become a volunteer for a public sector agency?**
The first step is to apply for a position that interests you. This Web site can help you locate and apply for opportunities online. Once you are selected for a position you and the project supervisor will sign a volunteer service agreement that describes the work, the time commitment and relevant factors such as training, equipment, accommodation, and health and safety.
2. **If there are several applicants for a volunteer assignment, must the applicant who seems to have the best qualifications on paper be chosen?**
No. The selection of a volunteer is not a formal competitive process. Volunteers are selected based on several considerations such as experience, education, availability, interest, motivation, and personal interview.
3. **What happens if I am injured while serving on a volunteer assignment?**
Volunteers who are enrolled with Federal agencies are covered under the Federal Employees Compensation Act, which authorizes compensation for work-related injuries. Prospective volunteers for other governmental entities should ascertain answers directly from these public sector organizations as there is so much variance between states and local governments on this important question.
4. **What if I have an accident and damage private property or injure someone while serving as a volunteer?**
Volunteers are covered under the Federal Tort Claims Act, which protects volunteers and Federal employees from liability for injury or damage to others while they are acting within the scope of their assigned duties. As stated above, prospective volunteers with other governments should ask about liability coverage afforded volunteers.
5. **Does the work I perform as a volunteer in a Federal agency count toward Federal service if I later become a Federal employee?**
No. Volunteers are not considered Federal employees. Your service is not creditable for leave accrual, retirement, or other benefit purposes should you later accept a Federal appointment. Similarly, serving as a volunteer for other government entities does not convey any benefits or entitlements.
6. **Can I add my volunteer service to my resume or job applications?**
Yes. The experience, knowledge and skills you gain as a volunteer are applicable to many paid positions in both public and private sectors. Volunteer work often demonstrates to prospective employers your personal initiative, enthusiasm, and dedication.
7. **Does serving as a volunteer for a Federal agency make it easier for me to obtain a job in the Federal government?**
Federal positions are filled through a competitive process and are based on many job-related factors. Your volunteer assignment may enhance your qualifications for a position, but it does not guarantee your selection.
8. **Can a volunteer perform services at home?**
Depending on the nature of the volunteer work, certain volunteer services can be performed at home. The volunteer supervisor would determine whether the volunteer work could be adequately accomplished at home, taking into consideration such things as the need to use Government equipment or facilities.
9. **Are there age limits for volunteers?**
People of all ages may volunteer. Young people, under age 18, can volunteer provided that the work does not pose a threat to their health or safety or violate Federal or State child labor laws or the policies of the agency's volunteer program. A parent or legal guardian must give written consent before a person under 18 years of age may volunteer.
10. **Are volunteers permitted to perform hazardous duty assignments?**
In some cases, adults aged 18 or over may perform hazardous duties. If volunteers perform such duties, appropriate certifications and training are required. This will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis by individual agencies. Volunteers may not perform active law enforcement activities. Where careful analysis shows an unacceptable risk to the volunteer's health or safety would preclude volunteers working in such activities.
11. **What is done to protect the health and safety of minors who volunteer for public sector agencies?**
Every effort is made to ensure that minors are protected and safeguarded during their assignments as volunteers and that they are provided adequate instruction and adult supervision. All partnering agencies comply with Federal or State child labor laws and the policies of their individual agencies in assigning minors to volunteer duties. In the interest of safety, volunteers under age 18 may not be assigned duties involving any of the following:
 - Underwater diving
 - Use of toxic chemicals or other laboratory hazards
 - Exposure to radioactive substances or biological hazards
 - Riding in small boats, helicopters or any unscheduled aircraft
 - Driving Government-owned motorized vehicles
 - Operation of power-driven machinery or equipment (e.g. chain saws, power shop tools, rock crushers, drill rigs, specialized equipment or vehicles, etc.)
 - Use of firearms, explosives or incendiaries
 - Exposure to any unusual or unacceptable health or safety risk
12. **Can students receive academic credit for their volunteer work?**
It is the decision of the educational institution whether or not to give credit for students' volunteer work. Supervisors of volunteers are usually willing to provide the necessary job descriptions and assessments of the student's work. Students are personally responsible for making the arrangements with the educational institution and their supervisor.
13. **May the relative of a Federal employee serve as a volunteer in the employee's agency?**
Yes. Immediate family members and other relatives of Federal employees may serve as volunteers in the same agency. Certain restrictions apply within each agency.

14. Can a Federal employee serve as a volunteer for a Federal volunteer program?

Yes. However, if the Federal employee volunteers for his or her hiring agency, the services must not be the same type of duties for which the employee is paid. It is very important that the volunteer services are substantially different from official duties.

15. May volunteers enter private property, when necessary, to conduct their assignments?

Federal employees and volunteers must comply with all Federal, State and Tribal laws, including trespass and privacy laws. Volunteers are not to enter private property unless authorized by their supervisor. Supervisors are responsible for obtaining appropriate permission to enter private property.

16. Are a volunteer's services tax-deductible?

Volunteers are advised to contact their tax accountant or consult Internal Revenue Service publication 526 for information and guidance.

17. Can non-U.S. citizens, residing outside the U.S., volunteer with a Federal agency?

Citizens of countries other than the U.S., who reside outside the U.S. are eligible to participate in Federal sponsored volunteer programs only if they are accepted for one of the Exchange Visitor Program categories through a designated sponsoring organization that is certified by the U.S. Department of State - see: http://travel.state.gov/visa/temp/types/types_1267.html. Both the U.S. National Park Service - see: <http://www.nps.gov/oia/> and the U.S. Forest Service have international programs - see: http://www.fs.fed.us/global/visitor_program For more information refer to the U.S. Customs and Immigration Service which is part of the Department of Home Land Security -- See: <http://www.uscis.gov/portal/site/uscis>.

18. Can non-U.S. citizens, residing within the U.S., volunteer with a Federal agency?

Individuals who are not U.S. citizens, but who reside in the U.S., may volunteer (1) if they are a lawful permanent residents; or (2) if they are non-immigrant aliens with F-1 or J-1 visa status, who are bona fide students residing in the U.S. solely to pursue a course of study at a recognized, approved institution of education. Foreign students may volunteer with a Federal natural resource agency if they have successfully received permission to engage in Optional Practical Training (OPT), Curricular Practical Training (CPT) or Academic Training (AT). For more information and instructions, students should consult the international student advisor at their university. An offer of employment or verification of a volunteer placement must be submitted with the student's application for OPT, CPT or AT. F-1 student visa holders may be required to submit applications for off-campus training and work to the international student advisor and United States Citizen and Immigration Services (USCIS) several months in advance of the proposed start date of the program. J-1 student visa holders may participate in academic training with the approval of their academic advisor and the J-1 responsible officer at their sponsor organization or institution.

See: <http://www.ice.gov/sevis/students/opt.htm>

19. Will the Federal agency pay my travel and living expenses if I volunteer in an area that is distant from my home?

As a general rule, volunteers are responsible for their own living expenses and travel to and from the location of the volunteer assignment. If funds or accommodations are available, they may be provided. Documentation of any reimbursement or arrangement for accommodations will be specified on the volunteer agreement.

20. If I am selected for a volunteer position that requires me to wear a uniform, do I have to pay for the uniform?

No. Volunteers who are required to wear a uniform as part of their assignment are provided the uniform at no cost.

21. What step should a prospective volunteer consider before seeking a volunteer position?*Step 1 - Identify your personal goals.*

Knowing your personal goals will help you choose a volunteer position that's right for you. Ask yourself, "Why do I want to volunteer? What are my goals? Do I want to make a difference in my career, my social life, my community, or something else? What do I hope to gain? To give? To learn?"

Step 2 - Assess your skills and interests.

What are you good at? What do you enjoy? What skills would you like to improve? If you have volunteered in the past, you can think about the things you liked the most and least about your experience. Be specific. Do you like working indoors or outdoors? Independently or with others? Would you choose to work in a behind-the-scenes position, such as a clerical assistant in the office of a partner agency, or in a position that provides direct service, such as a campground host or veterans' health volunteer?

Step 3 - Determine your time commitment.

Be realistic. After completing the above steps, you may feel anxious to get started. Before you do, try making a chart of the number of hours you spend on daily activities--job, family, friends, hobbies, chores, etc.--and see how much time is left. Then decide how many of these hours you are willing to donate to a volunteer position.

22. What are my rights and responsibilities as a volunteer?

Rights:

- Clear, Appropriate Assignment
- Fulfilling Work
- Orientation and Training
- Informed Involvement with Agency
- Supervision and Support
- Development of Individual Potential
- Recognition of Service
- Respect
- Time put to Best Use
- Safe, Healthy Working Conditions
- Right to terminate a volunteer agreement

Responsibilities:

- Be Honest about Goals, Skills, Limitations and Motivations
- Fulfill Your Commitment
- Maintain Confidentiality
- Cooperate With Staff
- Be Flexible and keep an Open Mind

- Stay Informed
- Participate in Training
- Ask for Help or Clarification
- Understand Your Role as a Volunteer

23. **What are the rights and responsibilities of the agency?**

Rights:

- Screen or Redirect Volunteers
- Request References
- Require Volunteers to Attend Training
- Expect Volunteers to be Responsible
- Reassign Volunteers
- Receive Notice of Leaving
- Terminate a volunteer agreement

Responsibilities:

- Interview candidates for Best Placement
- Provide a Written Position Description
- Treat Volunteers as Valuable Team-Members
- Inform of special events for the workforce
- Provide Supervision
- Seek and Respect Volunteer Contributions
- Conduct an Exit Interview

24. **What is Volunteer.gov?**

Volunteer.gov is a one-stop recruitment internet-based website that revolutionizes the matching of volunteer interests and abilities with available opportunities in the public sector nationwide.

25. **How does Volunteer.gov work?**

Individuals will be able to search for volunteer opportunities by the following criteria: volunteer activity, location of opportunity, effective date of the opportunity, the sponsoring partner and by keyword search.

26. **Where are the volunteer positions located?**

Volunteer positions are available nationwide with several Federal, State and local agencies.

27. **What types of volunteer opportunities are available through the Web site?**

The Web site offers thousands of volunteer opportunities related initially to natural resources and Veteran's health.

28. **What other volunteer opportunities will be available in the future?**

In the future, the Web site has the potential to incorporate volunteer opportunities for other service areas across government, such as science, healthcare, and social services.

29. **What happens once the volunteer identifies a potential opportunity?**

The potential volunteer can click on any opportunity on the list to view a detailed description, which will also include a method for application. Once the application is completed, the agency coordinator will be notified of the potential volunteer.

30. **What happens once a volunteer opportunity is filled?**

Volunteer.gov coordinators are responsible for posting and removing their filled positions. The database will enforce expiration dates set by the coordinator or will be preset by a system default.

31. **How will the Web site handle information learned about you from your visit?**

Volunteer.gov will collect and store only the following information: the name of the domain from which you access the Internet (for example, aol.com if you are connecting from America Online); the date and time you accessed the site; and the internet address of the Web site from which you link directly to the site. Volunteer.Gov DOES NOT store any personal identifiers.

32. **How will the volunteer opportunities be input in to the Web site?**

Each agency or bureau will have a volunteer coordinator or authorized representative who will have access to the opportunity portion of the web site via a password protected interface. The coordinator or representative will then enter the information that will later be provided to potential volunteers.