

# Volunteering

In today's competitive labour market it can be challenging to gain the experience and develop the skills that employers are seeking. You need experience to get a job, and you need a job to get experience. How can you break this cycle? The answer is simple: Volunteer!

## The Benefits of Volunteering

Volunteering can be a valuable experience, allowing you to:

- **Gain Skills and Experience.** Most volunteer positions offer the same opportunity to develop skills as paid positions. You can develop the communication, interpersonal, organizational, problem-solving, and computer skills, among countless others, that employers are looking for. For many positions and careers, the only way to get started is through volunteer work.
- **Explore Careers.** Volunteering affords an opportunity to investigate a career area and to discover the skills necessary for success in that field. This is a chance to answer questions such as "Is this what I want to do?", "Do I fit in here?" Volunteering offers a hands-on approach to self-assessment and is an easy way to explore career choices while in university or prior to looking for employment in a new field.
- **Connect with Organization Representatives.** Up to 80 percent of all work opportunities are never advertised. With this in mind, it is clear that you must either be in the right place at the right time or have contacts who can alert you to openings before they are advertised. In addition to actual openings, contacts can also provide the critical information regarding career areas that allow for informed and intelligent career choices. An important way to develop contacts while making a valuable contribution to an organization is by volunteering.
- **Participate in Your Community.** In these busy times, it is easy to neglect the community in which we live. Volunteering affords us the opportunity to give back to the organizations that have supported us or that have given to others. Through this practice we can strengthen both our community and ourselves. That accomplishment can provide an important sense of satisfaction and allow us to balance personal and professional needs.
- **Stay Sharp While Unemployed.** A lengthy job-search can be discouraging, especially if you are inactive most of the time. Volunteering can help you to keep your skills sharp, as well as to stay confident about your abilities—something that employers will notice during your job search.

## Important Tips for Finding Volunteer Positions

Volunteering is a commitment on your part. To make the most of the opportunity, consider the followings tips:

- Set clear and realistic goals for your volunteer experiences. Remember that you are trying to meet specific career exploration, skills development, contact development and community goals. Tailor your volunteer position to your specific needs and wants.
- As with any employment search, the most important factor is research and preparation. Make sure you refer to the guides in the Academic Advising & Career Centre (AA&CC) (AC213) since they can help you develop strategies and techniques for getting the volunteer work you are seeking.
- Have some fun! Volunteering can provide you with skills, contacts and opportunities. It can also be a source of satisfaction and accomplishment.

## Identifying Volunteer Opportunities

There are a number of volunteer sites that you may want to consult for volunteer listings in Toronto, Canada and around the world. We have listed a few of the key sites below. Keep in mind, however, that up to 80 percent of opportunities never get listed anywhere. To find these you need to research and network — for more information read the section entitled "Uncovering hidden opportunities" on this tipsheet.

## **Volunteering Websites**

### **Career Centre Online**

<http://www.careers.utoronto.ca>

Current volunteer openings are posted on CC Online, along with paid work opportunities. Click on the “Work Opportunities” link. From here, access all volunteer openings, or target your search with keywords.

### **The International Student Centre (ISC)**

**St. George** – <http://www.isc.utoronto.ca/index.html>

### **University of Toronto**

**UTSC** – <http://studentlife.utsc.utoronto.ca/isc/>

The International Student Centre located at UTSC (SL-151) as well as the International Student Centre located on the St. George Campus (33 St. George Street) both have a wide variety of resources for students interested in volunteer opportunities outside Canada. Staff can help in locating international volunteer opportunities and can provide support in making the necessary arrangements for living abroad.

### **Scarborough Campus Student Union**

<http://www.scsu.ca/?id=involved>

### **Volunteer Network Program (VNP)**

The Volunteer Network Program links students who are seeking volunteer opportunities with organizations who are in need of volunteers. You can either volunteer on a regular basis or volunteer at seasonal events.

### **Volunteer Centre of Toronto**

<http://www.volunteertoronto.ca/>

This service can assist you in finding specific volunteer opportunities through postings, resources and workshops.

### **Charity Village**

<http://www.charityvillage.com>

This Canadian site advertises volunteer and paid work postings, and provides profiles of organizations involved in the charitable and not-for-profit sector. Postings are searchable by geographic area and type of work.

### **Global Volunteer Network**

<http://www.volunteer.org.nz/>

This is a great site for those searching for international volunteer, educational, and community aid projects. It includes opportunities in developing countries for teaching English, environmental work, health and sanitation, and more.

### **Volunteer Canada**

<http://volunteer.ca/en/en-home>

Volunteer Canada is a national organization engaged in the promotion of volunteerism across Canada.

## **Uncovering Hidden Opportunities**

Many of the same resources that provide links to the paid labour market can provide links for you to find a volunteer opportunity in your area of interest. You can approach an organization directly and inquire about the availability of a volunteer opportunity, or it may be possible with some organizations to design your own position. Try some of the resources listed below to get you started.

### **Directory of Community Services in Metro Toronto**

<http://www.211toronto.ca/splash.jsp>

Community service organizations are frequently open to accepting volunteers, and in many cases depend on them to keep running. Consult the hard copy in the Career Resource Library or search it on-line.

### **Directory of Associations in Canada**

<http://main.library.utoronto.ca/eir/resources.cfm>

Professional and industry associations can be a great source of information on organizations and trends in a field of interest, and an excellent way to make contacts through events or directories. Browse the hard copy in the AA&CC or the on-line version through the University of Toronto Library E-resources. Search for “Associations Canada” at the above link.

### **Other Employer Directories**

<http://www.careers.utoronto.ca>

The AA&CC has a wide variety of industry-specific directories, as well as general geographic directories that you can search by industry index. Use them to search for contacts in your field of interest. To find which directories you could be using, ask at the Resource Desk for assistance, or consult the Library Catalogue on-line at the above link.

## **Looking for More Information?**

The AA&CC Resource Library has many print and electronic resources spanning all areas of career development and the job search. Research career options, educational programs, organizations, and industries. Learn more about résumé, interview, and networking strategies. A staff member is always available to assist you in finding resources to meet your specific needs.

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