The Value of Volunteering: Locally, Nationally, and Abroad

A volunteer can be defined as “a person who voluntarily undertakes or expresses a willingness to undertake a service while having no legal concern in the matter” (Merriam-Webster’s Online Dictionary).

Simply put, volunteering is a great way for students to gain experience. If you are looking for a short-term experience, volunteering at an organization within your community may be an excellent stepping stone to something more formal in the future. Many undergraduate students who aren’t yet “qualified” for internships find that volunteering is the best step they can take early in their university careers.

Benefits of Volunteering

The benefits of volunteering include:

Exploration
Volunteering, as a first step in career development, allows you to be actively involved in an area in which you have a career interest.

Freedom of Choice
When you volunteer it’s typically up to you to decide what type of organization you volunteer with and how many hours you volunteer.

Ability to Feel Good
From a purely selfish standpoint, volunteering can allow you to feel good about yourself and your contribution to the community.

Building Your Resume
From a professional standpoint, volunteering allows you to build experience that can be added to a resume.

Adding to Your Skill Set
Volunteering allows you to strengthen your core workplace skills and attributes (e.g., communication skills, teamwork, coping with change, valuing diversity, and leadership).

Expanding Your Network
The value of networking cannot be underestimated, and volunteering allows you to add many names to your contact list; these contacts can be used in the future when you are searching for internships and jobs.

Drawbacks of Volunteering

The benefits of volunteering outweigh the drawbacks, but there are some things to keep in mind when pursuing volunteering opportunities:

Respect
In organizations where the majority of workers are paid employees, volunteers are sometimes used for overflow work, can be treated with little or no respect, and given a large amount of work.

Biding Your Time
A major reason students volunteer is to gain hands-on experience in a field that interests them, but many times volunteers are asked to do things (i.e. stuffing envelopes, cleaning, etc.) that are undesirable or boring; often, volunteers will be asked to do these things until they have proved they are dependable and can take on more challenging duties.

Poor Job Prospects
Some organizations see volunteers merely as “free help” and look past them when job opportunities arise.

Emotional Involvement
Volunteers need to be careful not to become overly involved with an organization at the sake of their own time and energy; if an organization is asking too much of you, or possibly abusing your good-natured intentions, you need to decide if it’s worth your time.

Lack of Appreciation
Many organizations do a wonderful job at recognizing the work of their volunteers, but often times volunteers are taken for granted; a simple “thank you for your time” is often overlooked.
Volunteer Websites

Many websites are dedicated to helping students find volunteer opportunities that meet their interests and passions. Below you will find a sampling of some of the more popular websites for volunteer listings:

### Central Ohio

**HandsOn Central Ohio**
handsoncentralohio.org

Creator of the 2-1-1 information system in central Ohio, a gateway to services and volunteer opportunities in and around Columbus.

**Pay It Forward**
payitforward.osu.edu

The Pay It Forward site offers volunteer and service-learning opportunities, as well as a portfolio option where students can log their experiences.

**Service Learning**
service-learning.osu.edu

Includes a list of courses that are approved service-learning courses, giving Ohio State students an opportunity for hands-on experience and classroom learning.

**Habitat for Humanity**
habitatforhumanity.osu.edu

The Columbus chapter of Habitat for Humanity offers opportunities to become involved with projects in and around Columbus.

**Life Care Alliance**
lifecarealliance.org

Provides volunteer opportunities, many with their popular Meals on Wheels program throughout central Ohio.

**Goodwill**
goodwillcolumbus.org/volunteer

Goodwill Columbus offers volunteer opportunities in dozens of different areas and industries around Columbus.

**Serve Ohio**
serveohio.org

In partnership with the Ohio Community Service Council and the local AmeriCorps office, this organization offers volunteer opportunities in the state of Ohio.

### National

**Volunteer Match**
volunteermatch.org

Database of over 50,000 volunteer opportunities listed from nearly 70,000 different community and nonprofit organizations.

**Red Cross**
redcross.org

Offers volunteer opportunities at local Red Cross offices as well as listings for around the country; website also includes an online volunteer orientation.

**Corporation for National and Community Service**
cns.gov

Links to the Corporation for National and Community Service, and includes information about volunteer services and roles volunteers play in shaping our country.

**Points of Light Foundation**
pointsoflight.org

The Points of Light Foundation is a powerful, integrated national organization that links interested volunteers to centers around the country and includes three business units: the HandsOn Network, MissionFish, and the Civic Incubator.

**Teach For America**
teachforamerica.org

While not necessarily volunteer work, Teach For America allows recent grads to serve for two years as a teacher in an area of the United States where teachers are needed the most; corps members have a contracted yearly salary and receive health benefits and education waivers.

**Serve.gov**
serve.gov

A website for Americans to find a way to serve within their own communities.

**The Salvation Army**
http://www.use.salvationarmy.org/use/www_use_CentralOhio.nsf

The Salvation Army offers volunteer opportunities in Columbus ranging from after-school programs to their renowned Red Kettle Bell Ringer program.

**COSI**
www.cosi.org/volunteer-employment

Opportunities to volunteer at the Center of Science & Industry (COSI) are a great way for students to gain hands-on experience working with children.
1-800-Volunteer
www.1-800-volunteer.org
A database for volunteer opportunities around the country; allows you to search for a volunteer center close to you

The Nature Conservancy
nature.org/volunteer
Lists volunteer opportunities with The Nature Conservancy, for those interested in the environment, nature, and local conservation efforts

HUD
hud.gov/volunteering
Lists both federal and national volunteer programs and clearinghouses

Volunteer.gov
volunteer.gov
Is a database of volunteer opportunities for those interested in natural resources and the environment

AmeriCorps
americorps.gov
Each year AmeriCorps offers over 75,000 opportunities to become a corps member; AmeriCorps members receive both stipends and education awards for their service

Global Volunteers
globalvolunteers.org
A consultant to the United Nations since 1999, Global Volunteers provides experiences both internationally and nationally

Mercy Corps
mercy corps.org/volunteer
Mercy Corps exists to alleviate suffering, poverty, and oppression by helping people build secure, productive, and just communities via volunteer opportunities around the globe

Peace Corps
peacecorps.gov
Lists volunteer opportunities around the world in Peace Corps locations; corps members receive educational benefits, medical benefits, student loan deferment, and monthly stipends

ServeNet
servenet.org
Part of Youth Service America, this site offers volunteer opportunities and profiles/links to volunteer organizations around the globe; organizes Global and National Youth Service Day

Catholic Volunteer Network
catholicvolunteernetwork.org
The Catholic Volunteer Network is a nonprofit organization of 200 domestic and international volunteer and lay mission programs

International

Idealist.org
idealist.org
Database of over 15,000 volunteer opportunities located internationally and within the United States

IVPA
volunteerinternational.org
The International Volunteer Programs Association (IVPA) is an association of non-governmental organizations involved in international volunteer work and internship exchanges

Volunteer Abroad
volunteerabroad.com
Provides both volunteer opportunities and study abroad experiences around the globe, including information on “how to get started” with your search and travel

Habitat for Humanity
habitat.org
The Habitat for Humanity website offers opportunities to become involved with projects locally and around the world

UNV
unv.org
The United Nations Volunteers (UNV) program is the UN organization that contributes to peace and development through volunteerism worldwide