Volunteering & Community Service

In a Nutshell

Volunteering and community service are important components for community progress. Many programs and everyday events cannot succeed without the help of volunteers. This tool item should help to find service opportunities and help coordinate groups more efficiently. When a person donates their time, they learn the importance of these programs and why they are critical to help another.

The “How To”

Opportunities to volunteer come in many forms: volunteering for civic engagement organizations such as community centers, boys & girls clubs, adopt-a-pet, community cleanup, mentoring programs, building houses, emergency and disaster situations, and more. Through volunteering, people forge friendships, connect with other organizations, and help achieve the missions to make our region a better place. Volunteering may connect people to employment. Prospective volunteers should begin by finding an organization to meet their interests.

Find an organization or opportunities that interest you or fit your skill level. Non-profit organizations and service organizations have mission statements. Read their mission and vision statements to decide if you would enjoy helping to advance their mission. Also, know what you want to gain from this opportunity. Are you promoting philanthropy, is this a one-time project, or would like you to foster an on-going relationship with a particular organization?

Finding people to volunteer with makes these efforts much more rewarding. Volunteer with friends, a neighborhood association, school classes, or co-workers. Companies take pride in their employees completing hours of community service. Students learn the importance of helping others, and these opportunities become life lessons. Residents empower their communities by ensuring their streets are well taken care of. Many companies partner with other companies to volunteer together. Larger groups may require a volunteer coordinator. These coordinators become liaisons between the service sites and their group of volunteers. Volunteer coordinators should know what results they want to achieve for the organization and their volunteers. After volunteering, stay in touch with your group. Ask for feedback on how they think they day went, what did they learn, and what would they like to see more of. Hopefully after the day, this fosters action to do more.

Planning & Zoning

There are a plethora of sources for finding sites for community service days. Contact your neighborhood association or a local school, university, or college and plan a day with their coordinator. Volunteer Match provides information about many volunteer opportunities in your area.

Know the number of volunteers and what days they are available. Volunteer opportunities happen 7 days a week. For employers, weekends may work best. For schools, after school may work best. Maybe you might like to mentor a student every Tuesday after work, or participate in a neighborhood cleanup day once a month.

Dollars & Cents

Volunteering requires donating time instead of money. In most cases, the organization you are volunteering for will provide your group of volunteers with the tools necessary to complete projects.If you do have costs, they depend on what types of programs interest you. Cost may include:

- Coordinating some type of breakfast, lunch, or dinner for the volunteers.
- Organizing a bus for transportation.
- Materials if your employer is invested in building or painting.

Measuring Success

By volunteering, you have contributed to a worthwhile cause.

- You should gain awareness of the challenges and issues faced by charitable organizations.
- Have opportunities to promote leadership capabilities and organizational skills.
- Communities and neighborhoods may have more engaged residents and citizens.
- Add your community service onto your resume. Employers and colleges take notice of your volunteering experience.

Discover More

Become Involved with Greening Saint Louis

Organizations within the Saint Louis region offer many sustainable volunteering opportunities. If you explore Saint Louis on bike or use the greenways and trails, volunteering for Great Rivers Greenway and Trailnet may interest you. Volunteering at Earth Dance or Seed STL's volunteer opportunities can teach you about gardening. Even if you have a home or community garden, this is a perfect opportunity to learn more and ask questions of experts in the gardening fields.

Paid Positions

Programs such as Americorps, Teach For America, Food Corps, and Jesuit Volunteer Corps provide paid positions or stipends for a variety of service positions. People may teach in high-need public schools or work directly within our most impoverished communities.

Groups interested in volunteering in partnership with Saint Louis University should visit the Center for Service and Community Engagement. They offer one-time volunteer opportunities or ongoing programs.

For animal lovers, there are volunteer opportunities to help our four-legged friends through the Humane Society, as well as many other organizations.