
Plan Your Volunteer Project Schedule

Before you begin recruiting volunteers (see [How To Recruit Volunteers](#)), you should come up with an outline of the projects you need help with and create a schedule that offers a few different volunteering opportunities.

1. Volunteer Schedules

Different organizations will have different schedules for their volunteer programs depending on the kind of help they need and the type of volunteers they want to engage. For example, if your volunteers are mostly students, we suggest following a four-month term. Whichever time period works for your organization, it is a good idea to make it a set length of time with a beginning and an end. Here are some of the benefits of a scheduled cycle for volunteers:

- It is a good bonding experience for new volunteers to start and go through orientation together;
- If a volunteer is not a good fit for any reason – for example, she may be unsuited to the job or cannot get along with others – you have a chance to end the relationship naturally at the end of the term;
- If the volunteer is great, you can offer her a promotion or new responsibilities at the end of the term;
- Volunteers know that if they are not happy with the work, they can change jobs after the end of the term. This allows volunteers to better manage their own investment.

2. Volunteer Project Timeline

It should include:



3. Designing a Schedule

If your organization has never had a structured volunteer program before, we recommend designing a volunteer schedule with just one or two weekly projects that require small groups of volunteers. Perhaps a few times a year, you can add on a work party or public event/action where all the volunteers and other supporters are invited to participate.

These should be projects that do not require a high level of expertise and can be taught in one-day training sessions. Volunteers who do well at the basic tasks can take on more responsibility or leadership roles by becoming more vocal and active in the monthly meetings.

When designing a schedule, please pay attention to:

- ✓ Keep time commitments to a minimum at the start. For new volunteers, do not ask for too much – a few hours per week is plenty. Even though some volunteers are very enthusiastic and wish to work for 20 or 40 hours a week, you need to let them prove themselves with a few hours at first. Depending on their performance you can increase their working hours over time. Set a clear time commitment. Discuss with the volunteer how much time she can commit and encourage her to be realistic. Give new volunteers a lighter load to start with to assess how fast and how well he or she works, and adjust accordingly.
- ✓ Make it easy for volunteers to succeed. Make it very clear what the goals are for each project, and set goals that are easy to achieve. This will make it easier for volunteers to feel successful. Volunteers who feel that they have failed or that they have taken on more responsibility than they can manage will stop coming in.
- ✓ Set clear guidelines and steps for the project. This will help everyone to keep up with what is happening and who is responsible for what.

- ✓ Include gradual steps in which volunteers can take on greater responsibility and develop new skills. Let new volunteers know that if they are successful, there are opportunities for them to grow in the organization and take on more leadership. Someone who comes often and contributes a lot could become the head of a volunteer project later or could have the opportunity for special training or travel.

When designing a volunteer project, begin by assessing the areas for which you need help and what skills are needed for each area. This will help you determine the kinds of people you need to recruit. For instance, if you are publishing a magazine, you may need people to help with planning the issue, writing articles, editing them, designing the magazine, finding pictures and getting permission to use them, and distributing the magazine. You may need people who are good writers or who are very detail-oriented.

A very different project would involve visiting women at home who have health problems and giving them support and assistance. For that project, you might need people who are empathetic, who know a little bit about medicine, who know something about the local hospital system, and who can help women to get the medical care they need.

For each project, you should be able to answer the following questions. Based on your answers to the questions below, you will be able to fill out the **Template | Project Chart**. You will also want to keep track of your volunteers with the **Template | Volunteer Database**.

- ✓ What is the project and why does it need to be done?
- ✓ What are the steps involved in getting it done (*e.g.*, “First we need to do X, then we need to do Y...”)?
- ✓ How many people do you need for the project and what skills do they

- need to have?
- ✓ How much time each week does each person need to spend to get the project done?
 - ✓ Is there an end date for this project? If it is an ongoing service, how long will you ask volunteers to help out?
 - ✓ Do you need security checks for the volunteers (*e.g.*, if they will be working with children, or handling funds)?
 - ✓ Will you have to provide transportation for volunteers?

Example: Volunteer Project Design Exercise

You are designing a simple program for a new group of sex workers. For this program, you will be conducting the activities below and, for each activity, you need different volunteers:

Street-level outreach to sex workers: A group of volunteers commits to spending two or three hours on one night a week talking to sex workers on the street and in their work places, and distributing condoms and health and safety information.

A weekly activity night for kids: One evening a week, the office is open to anyone who wants to bring children by for group activities, while the parents have tea and chat. A group of volunteers is responsible for opening the office, buying refreshments, planning activities for kids, and coordinating the activities.

4. Volunteer Job Descriptions

The job description should reflect the answers to all of the questions listed above in order to help volunteers understand their responsibilities better.

Title

Give the position a short title that helps the volunteer with his identity, responsibilities and sense of belonging in the organization. It also indicates what the volunteer will do so that the team can understand the position better.

Major Objectives

Describe the goals that the volunteer will work towards in one or two sentences.

Schedule & Location

Detail the number of hours and days of the week the volunteer is needed, and the place where the volunteer will perform the job: in the office? at home? at school? Also include information about other aspects of the time requirement (*e.g.*, cross-time zone work).

Major Responsibilities

List specific duties and responsibilities.

Qualifications

List any skills, education, knowledge, and age qualifications needed to perform the job; stress whether you are looking for volunteers from certain communities or with special backgrounds.

Length of Commitment

Specify the length of work: what is the start and end date? how many hours per week?

Training Opportunities and Other Benefits

List the general and specific training associated with the position. List any expenses that will be paid or materials provided.

Benefits

List what benefits they can get (*e.g.*, lunches, T-shirts, and other opportunities to develop themselves).

Contact of the Volunteer Coordinator

List the contact information for the people who will manage the volunteers.

Exercise: Design a Job Description

Please design a job description based on the information below:

- Provide consultations and support for children undergoing antiretroviral therapy;
- Weekly home visits to two HIV/AIDS affected families outside of the orphanage;
- Organize monthly activities (arts, nutrition, music, etc.) for HIV/AIDS affected children and parents outside of the orphanage;
- Organize weekly activities (arts, nutrition, music, etc.) for HIV/AIDS affected orphans in the orphanage;
- Organize three non-discrimination conferences at local schools with the participation of school teachers and parents.

The five activities mentioned above all need volunteers, choose one of them and design a job description.

After learning about volunteer project planning, we have to come back to the core of volunteer management – that is, while working with volunteers, there are some tricky problems that every organization will face.

Who is the “Boss”?

Ideally, your organization should be a place where every member has the right to be involved in the work you do. But in practice, some people need to be responsible for a program’s effective implementation. Most importantly, when setting up a program team, recruiting staff and volunteers, and building relationships with other teams, at least one person has to be the key contact, providing names, email addresses and phone numbers for other people to reach the team.

This person needs to position herself as “providing support to volunteers” rather than managing volunteers and giving orders. It is essential to build a strong team that supports everyone, especially for volunteers. The volunteer coordinator or team leader should ensure that every volunteer

understands your organization's mission and expectations, and they should have necessary skills and knowledge to be a volunteer. In addition, if a volunteer encounters any problems or begins to lose interest, the coordinator or team leader should try to look for solutions to keep them engaged without wasting the limited resources of your organization.

The people in charge of managing volunteers should be good listeners, patient, organized, efficient, and should have strong communication skills. If a person is impatient, grumpy, aggressive, and always misses or forgets important information, then this person is not suitable for managing volunteers. Ideally, the volunteer coordinator's main duty should be working with volunteers without distraction from any other matters. In fact, some larger organizations – and small NGOs that have established a large volunteer base – might need a paid volunteer coordinator to work with their volunteers (sounds nice, doesn't it?).

If one volunteer proves herself or himself to be reliable, then it is a good idea to promote this person to be the team leader. Every volunteer project needs a volunteer to be the team leader. You need to know this person and make sure that she or he is reliable and experienced. This person needs to arrive early to every event and activity to prepare and review work every week with the organization's volunteer coordinator or program manager in order to communicate the progress of the project and the status of all of the other volunteers involved.

Do we need to pay volunteers?

This is a very important decision and different organizations have different practices. Paying volunteers is considered normal in many countries, but there are also reasons why you might choose not to pay your volunteers:

- If some people get paid for their contribution while others do not, it may cause a sense of unfairness and distrust in the organization;
- You may not get enough funding to pay all of your volunteers;
- If volunteers get paid, they may feel responsible to the people who pay them, instead of to the rest of team.

Besides paying your volunteers, there are other ways to incentivize them and show appreciation for their contribution:

- Provide food at meetings;
- Provide free babysitting services so that parents can participate in evening activities;
- Reimburse transportation so that they do not have to pay out-of-pocket to attend activities.

Some people might be interested in looking for a job in an NGO. If you consider them useful, you can help them build skills that will be essential for the job in which they are interested. You can provide them with additional training opportunities or look for funding that can be used to pay them.

You can also suggest to a volunteer that he look for a paid job and refer this person to the opportunities of which you are aware. This may sound self-destructive. Actually, this is a kind of investment. In the short term, you lose a volunteer; but in the long run, you gain a resourceful peer. This person will be positive about your organization and will probably support you whenever he or she has the opportunity to do so. A former volunteer will keep “advertising” for your organization in his or her new job and let people see that you have developed a smart, capable, and knowledgeable leader.