

Group Volunteering – Team Leader Handbook

This handbook is intended as a guide for anyone who:

- recruits and coordinates volunteers who wish to volunteer together, as a group, to help out a host community organization;
- works with a host organization to organize such an activity;
- serves as a liaison between a volunteer group and a host community organization

Once your volunteer group has decided upon a volunteer activity and found a host organization, it's time for some strategizing. A bit of planning and organizing upfront will ensure a pleasant and rewarding volunteer experience for everyone involved. When you see your group working as a team, learning new skills, lending a helping hand and having fun doing it, this preparatory work will seem like a smart investment.

So, here's a guide to help you plan your group volunteering activity, efficiently and practically. Depending on the size of your group, which community organization you will be working with, and what type of activity you've chosen, you probably won't need *all* of the information we've included.

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Before the Big Day

A successful group volunteering project will entail at least two months of planning, so make sure you have enough lead time to get things done properly. Here are some basics you'll need to attend to before the actual volunteer activity (as known as "The Big Day"):

Once you've found a host organization to work with:

1. **Visit their web site:** you'll learn all about their mandate, the clientele they work with, the services they offer, and where they are located. If the organization does not have their own website, you might still be able to find out more about them on:

<http://www.arrondissement.com/tout-directory/t1/>

http://www.centraide-mtl.org/centraide/static/whoare/Home_agencies.shtml

2. **Get in touch with the organization:** contact their volunteer coordinator to get more information about your group's volunteer activity day. Here are some sample questions to ask:

- How does one get to their location?
- What are the timings for the activity?
- Can they give you some idea of how the Big Day will proceed (order of events, etc.)?
- Who is the group's go-to person within the organization? Should that person be unavailable the day-of, is there someone else who will be there to help you out?
- Will they be giving the group an explanatory introduction to the organization? If so, how long might this take?
- Would the group need training in order to be able to accomplish their task(s)? If so, how much time would this require?
- Is there a changing room and/or are there lockers for personal belongings?
- Would the group have access to the organization's washrooms?
- Should you bring water or is there access to a drinking fountain/sink, etc?
- Is there somewhere everyone could eat and is it big enough to accommodate the whole group?
- Will you be offering us a meal, a snack, or beverages?
- Do our volunteers need any special clothing? If so, will you provide it?
- Will you be providing us with any necessary supplies or is that our responsibility?
- May we bring a CD-player or boom box?
- May we take pictures of or film during our activity?
- For outdoor activities, what happens in case of rain or snow?

Provide the organization with some background information about your group, such as:

- Why you are interested in volunteering (to participate in your company's national volunteer day, as a team-building exercise, or to learn new skills, for instance)
- The number of volunteers expected to participate
- Basic information about the group's members (age, gender, whether they have any previous volunteer experience, etc.)
- If your company or organization's director, manager, etc., will be accompanying your group
- Any physical or intellectual limitations among your group's members
- Any scheduling, dietary, or transportation constraints the group might have to deal with (examples: must leave at 4pm; someone's allergic to nuts; are carpooling and require parking).

3. **Let your group know about the volunteer activity:** ([see the template email for recruiting volunteers](#))
4. **Visit the organization:** by visiting an organization in person, you'll not only meet their staff and clients, you'll gain an understanding of what they deal with on a day to day basis. From their business hours to the services they offer, from the size of their premises to whether or not they have an emergency evacuation plan in place, it's all vital information which can help you organize your group volunteering activity. And you'll have that much more information to provide to your group.
5. **Keep your group in the loop via a short monthly update:** let them know how the project is proceeding so they remain interested and enthusiastic. Keep it simple but include: your group's reasons for volunteering and what you hope to gain from the experience, your host organization's mission, a description of the task(s) you'll be helping them out with and why they are important, and practical information (where and when to meet, what to wear, what to bring – lunch, supplies, etc. – and what transportation arrangements are being made).
6. **Keep in touch with the organization:** let them know of any changes (in the number of volunteers involved, to timetables, and so on). Don't hesitate in calling your contact with additional questions or for clarifications.

Four to six weeks before your volunteering activity, take care of the nitty-gritty:

- Get **directions and plan a route** to where you'll be volunteering
- Organize **transportation** – carpooling or via public transport
- If your group will require **T-shirts, baseball caps, or other “team” gear**, make the necessary arrangements within your organization and with a supplier.
- Purchase or collect any **supplies** you might need for the activity
- Order boxed **lunches** if neither the host organization nor your group has made arrangements for a meal (watch out for dietary restrictions!). If you will be eating **outdoors**, remember to bring drinking glasses, cutlery, napkins, garbage bags, etc.
- If the organization has agreed to allow photography, make sure someone is bringing a **camera** or that the organization has one you can use.
- If the organization has agreed to it, work out the details about the **boom box/radio** (do you need to bring one or can you borrow theirs, where can you plug it in). Ask your volunteers to bring along some favourite **CDs**.
- **Assign** someone on your team to handle:
 - o **Coordination, if your activity involves more than one task**; make sure that they understand what they will be undertaking and are comfortable with the role.
 - o **Safety and security**, in case of emergency (to be in charge of the first-aid kit, evacuation, etc.).
 - o **Photography and/or filming the occasion**: if there are specific moments you wish captured on film, make sure to provide the volunteer with such a list (action shots, the group with someone from the host organization, etc.). Remember, you need permission to publish or otherwise use someone's photo, be it in a picture or on video, on paper or on-line. We've provided template photo release forms for [adults](#) and [minors](#) on which you can base your own document, to be signed by everyone involved in your activity (be they members of your group or affiliated with the host organization).
 - o To be your **understudy**, to take over your responsibilities on the Big Day, just in case you can't make it.
- Make a **contact list** with the names and phone numbers of the members of your group as well as of the contact(s) at the host organization.

One to two weeks before:

- **Finalize everything** with the host organization – the number of participants, the schedule, and that all supplies are at-hand.
- **Provide your contact at the host organization with a phone number** to reach you (and your understudy!), just in case there are any changes on the day of the event itself.
- **Finalize** things with your group; remind them that the group is depending on their participation and punctuality to make the event a success. **Provide everyone with numbers at which to reach you and your understudy** in case of emergency on the Big Day.

On the Big Day

Keep in mind that on the day of the activity, as team leader, you'll need to be available to liaise between your group's members and the host organization. While you may be able to join your group in the activity at hand, you will also need to spend some time coordinating things and making sure all is well. Try to:

- **Keep things light** but purposeful, so your team stays enthusiastic.
- **Keep your schedule** intact by anticipating the next phase of the day; remember that it often takes longer to get a group to finish up something or get somewhere.
- **Introduce your** to "go-to" folks in charge of coordination, security, and photography to everyone (your group and the host organization).
- **Be clear** in communicating instructions, objectives, and any new information or changes to the day's plans.
- **Ensure that each participant** has something to accomplish and is comfortable with their role.
- **Ascertain** whether or not your **objectives** will be reached given how things are going organizationally and in terms of timing.
- **Clean up and put things away** after you are done for day, if necessary and if the host organization has asked you to do so.

N.B.: It is par for the course that some volunteers will not be able to make it on the Big Day. Be prepared to manage things with a smaller team!

Afterwards

We know you pulled off this project in style, but it is still worth asking all those who were involved for feedback in the days following your group volunteering activity.

1. **Call and thank your host organization** for a pleasant and productive volunteer activity. Ask your contact if he or she would write a short email of thanks to the group, outlining just why their contribution was so meaningful to both the organization and the community.
2. **Thank the members of your group for their participation** - see the [Volunteer Appreciation and Recognition Email template](#). Take the opportunity to ask them to answer a few questions about the experience – see the [Sample Questions for Volunteer Feedback](#). Or, consider having a feedback session over a group breakfast, lunch, etc. Pass on any relevant comments to the host organization.
3. Based on what you've learned, put together a **short critical assessment** to serve as guidelines for any future such project. By all means, feel free to make changes to this handbook, or add in suggestions specific to your group's situation.
4. **Share** the photos or videos from the event with everyone in your group and with the host organization; write about your experience for your organization's newsletter, intranet, or annual report. (Your host organization would no doubt appreciate receiving a copy of your account).
5. **Do it all again!** Why not build on the experience, training, and trust you've got with your host organization? Maybe your company/school/group could "adopt" the organization and help them out on a regular basis. Or, you could always chart new territory with another organization

Appendices

Recruiting volunteers - Template email

To: (potential participant's name)
From: (team leader's name)
Subject: (name of the volunteer project)

Show your true colours! Join (name of company or group) volunteers in making a difference to (name of community organization).

On (day & date), we'll (nice description of the requested volunteer activity or tasks) to benefit (name of community organization), which (brief description of the organization and its mission).

This is a great way to get to know your fellow coworkers/comrades, learn new skills, and have fun! Not to mention help out a deserving (cause/organization/your community, etc.)

Come join us on (date) and help (name of company or group). (Friends and family are welcome; volunteers must be at least (age) years old.) If you are interested in participating, please (insert instructions on how to sign up and by when).

Looking forward to working with you!

With thanks,
(Team leader's name)

Photo Release Form for Adults – Template

PHOTO/VIDEO WAIVER AND RELEASE FORM

(For adults)

I,

First name:

Family name: of,

Address:

City: **Postal code:**

AUTHORIZE *(insert the name and address of your group), TO*

(Please check the appropriate box(es))

Take my picture, record, or film me while I participate in the organization's volunteer activities.

Use these images in any publications, displays, presentations or other related use in any format (print, electronic, on-line, or other media) for the purposes of documenting and promoting their activities and projects.

I hereby waive any copyright or other rights I might have to these images, in perpetuity.

Name (please write clearly/in block letters):

Signature:

Date:

Photo Release Form for Minors - Template

PHOTO/VIDEO WAIVER AND RELEASE FORM

(For those under 18 years of age, to be completed by a parent or legal guardian)

I,

First name:

Family name: of,

Address:

City: **Postal code:**

IN MY ROLE AS PARENT AND/OR LEGAL GUARIDAN OF THE FOLLOWING MINORS:

Child's first and last name:

Child's first and last name:

AUTHORIZE *(insert the name and address of your group,)* **TO**

(Please check the appropriate box(es))

- Take pictures of, record, or film the above-mentioned minor(s) while they participate in the organization's volunteer activities.
- Use these images in any publications, displays, presentations or other related use in any format (print, electronic, on-line, or other media) for the purposes of documenting and promoting their activities and projects.

I hereby waive any copyright or other rights I might have to these images, in perpetuity.

Name (please write clearly/in block letters):

Signature:

Date:

Volunteer Appreciation and Recognition – Template email

To: (potential participant's name)
From: (team leader's name)
Subject: (name of the volunteer project)

On behalf of (company or group name), thank you for volunteering for (host community organization's name) on (date). With your help, we were able to (project results/benefits). (Community's organization name) was quite impressed with our hard work and dedication to the community.

We hope your volunteer experience was a fun and rewarding one. It would be great to get your feedback so we can make our next volunteer activity even better - please take a moment to fill out a brief evaluation form by (provide instructions on how to access). Once you've completed the evaluation form, you'll be able to access all of the great photos taken during the volunteering activity.

Thank you again for doing such a great job and for making our project a huge success! We couldn't have done it without you!

Best,
(Team leader's name)

Volunteer Feedback – Sample questions

Use the following as inspiration for your feedback questionnaire:

Things to assess:

- The initial information provided to potential volunteers about the activity
- The logistics and organization of the event
- Whether or not the activity was rewarding or valuable on a personal level for those involved
- Whether or not the activity was rewarding or valuable to the group as a whole (in terms of team-building, getting to know one another better, etc.).
- Did the activity lead the group to a better understanding of the nature of the work done by the host organization
- Was the group satisfied with how the host organization welcomed and trained them, do they feel that their efforts were recognized.
- Overall value of the day's activity

Ask for:

- **General feedback** about the activity, the host organization, or your organization's volunteer efforts.
- **Suggestions** on how to improve future such projects or your organization's volunteer/community involvement program.

Follow-up: would some members of your group be interested in volunteering at the host organization outside of activities organized by your company or organization?

- If so, to do what?
- If not, why? (Is it a question of distance, transportation, scheduling, a lack of enthusiasm for the host organization, the fact that they already volunteer elsewhere, or another reason entirely?)

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