

# ServiceLeader.org: For Volunteers

## Put Volunteer Work on Your Resume

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When you are looking for a job, your resume gets your foot in the door. It represents you to a potential employer and you want it to stand out from the resumes of the other applicants. One way to capture the interest of an employer is to show that you are an involved citizen -- someone who works to make the community a better place to live. In other words, make sure your volunteer work appears on your resume.

It is a common misconception that there is only one "right" way to design a resume. Actually, the most important thing is to present the information in such a way as to document and support your career goal. If you tell a prospective employer that you want a particular job, your resume must prove that you are the right candidate to fill it. Sometimes your paid work history may not be as important as what you have done as a volunteer in demonstrating that you have the necessary job skills.

One approach used by many people is to add a section to their resumes called "Community Service" or "Volunteer Work." They list the highlights of their volunteering here, to show that they have interests outside of their employment history already described. This is certainly better than ignoring volunteer experience on a resume, but it is not the best way to highlight what you have learned as a volunteer.

Consider integrating your volunteer work into the section of your resume called "Work Experience." Even if you were not paid a salary and did not consider the volunteering to be "employment," it certainly was productive work and should count as "experience." The key is to translate what you gained from the volunteer activity into the language of the paid work world.

Don't use "volunteer" as a job title. It's an adjective and alone does not convey the work that you accomplished. So, if you did tutoring, use the title "Tutor." If you coordinated a project, identify your work accurately as "Project

Coordinator." The fact that you filled this position in an unpaid capacity is part of your description of the work. First grab your prospective employer's interest with an accurate position title.

Next describe the volunteer work in terms of your achievements, highlighting the skills that you learned and demonstrated. What would be important to the work world about what you did? For example, did you raise \$100,000? Did you manage a budget or accomplish goals on schedule? Did you supervise a staff of people? Even if they, too, were volunteers, your success required the ability to be a motivating leader. All these sorts of things impress an employer.

Take the time to analyze what you learned as a volunteer. Did you have the chance to practice public speaking? Write reports, news releases, newsletters? Plan projects, coordinate sub-committees, train others to do the work? Such skills are applicable to just about any setting.

Describe your activities and achievements fully. You do not need to say these were done as a volunteer, though you are of course welcome to do so. If you feel uneasy about representing volunteer work as equivalent to a full-time paid job, you can identify the volunteering as being part-time. Be honest. Don't overstate what you did. But also be sure to give yourself the credit you deserve.

If you are a student seeking your first real job, being able to show volunteer work on a resume demonstrates that you had interests beyond the classroom. If you are returning to the paid work force after some time away, your volunteer activities prove that you kept yourself sharp and involved. If you want to change career fields, it may be your volunteer work in the new field that tells a prospective employer you're worth the risk, even if all your paid employment history is in some other field.

Be unapologetic about giving space on your resume to volunteering. Since the whole goal of a resume is to get you an interview, think how more interesting your face-to-face conversation will be when you add all those community activities to show you who really are.

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