

VOLUNTEER



POINTS
OF LIGHT

WHAT IS IT AND WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Throughout history, volunteers have stepped up to support communities when they have needed help the most — neighbors supporting neighbors during a time of crisis and strangers supporting strangers to solve an issue impacting their community.

Volunteering represents an individual's ability to lend their time and talent to a cause they care about, to advance a cause or help solve a societal issue without personal gain (monetary or otherwise). It's about sharing time and can even be as impactful as donating money.

Volunteering takes many different shapes and forms.

In the more formal sense, people volunteer to support nonprofit organizations. Through volunteers, these organizations can do the greatest good and deliver on their missions.

However, not all acts of volunteerism take place through formal structures. Every day we see people share their time and talents with others through informal actions that they might not even label as "volunteering." In fact, recent civic engagement research from Points of Light reveals that while 43% of Americans prefer to volunteer with nonprofit organizations, 28% prefer to volunteer with friends or neighbors without an organization¹.

THE MANY SHAPES AND FORMS OF VOLUNTEERING

- Planting flowers in an elderly neighbor's yard
- Making meals for a friend who is experiencing a health issue
- Building a community garden with colleagues
- Phone banking to support a "get out the vote" campaign
- Providing virtual homework help to children at a youth organization
- Serving on the board of directors for a local nonprofit organization
- Providing technical expertise to a nonprofit to improve their IT systems



FIVE THINGS TO CONSIDER ABOUT VOLUNTEERING



1. Work with, not for. When you volunteer, it's about working "with" a community, not "for" that community. It's about sharing time, not giving. Volunteers have as much to gain and learn from the experience as those they are supporting.



2. Do your homework. When you learn more about an issue and its current context before volunteering, it can go a long way in helping you to better understand who you're supporting and why.



3. Answer the call, don't make it. Some volunteer tasks may seem more "glamorous" or "interesting" than others. To do the greatest good, respond to the needs of the experts and share your time where it's needed the most.



4. Small acts matter. Everyone can make a difference through volunteering. Change doesn't have to happen on a large scale for it to be meaningful. When you walk a dog for a sick neighbor or help clean up a local park, these acts, however "small," mean a great deal to the individual or community benefitting.



5. Share your skills. Volunteering can be a meaningful way to bring your personal passions to life. Whether it's skills you've developed in the workplace or those developed as a result of a hobby, you can help organizations thrive by sharing your talents with others.

¹Points of Light Civic Engagement Research



TAKE A DEEPER DIVE AND LEARN MORE



Find volunteer opportunities near you at [Points of Light Engage](#) and [Volunteer Match](#)



Volunteering is good for your health! Explore how with [Volunteering and its Surprising Benefits](#)



Get the kids involved with [Family Friendly Volunteer Projects](#)



WATCH: [Why Volunteering is Our Most Precious Heirloom](#) (TEDx Talk)

DOING GOOD BETTER

How Effective Altruism Can Help You Help Others. Do Work That Matters, and Make Smarter Choices about Giving Back.

BOOK: [Doing Good Better: How Effective Altruism Can Help You Help Others. Do Work That Matters, and Make Smarter Choices about Giving Back](#) By William MacAskill

THINK ABOUT IT...

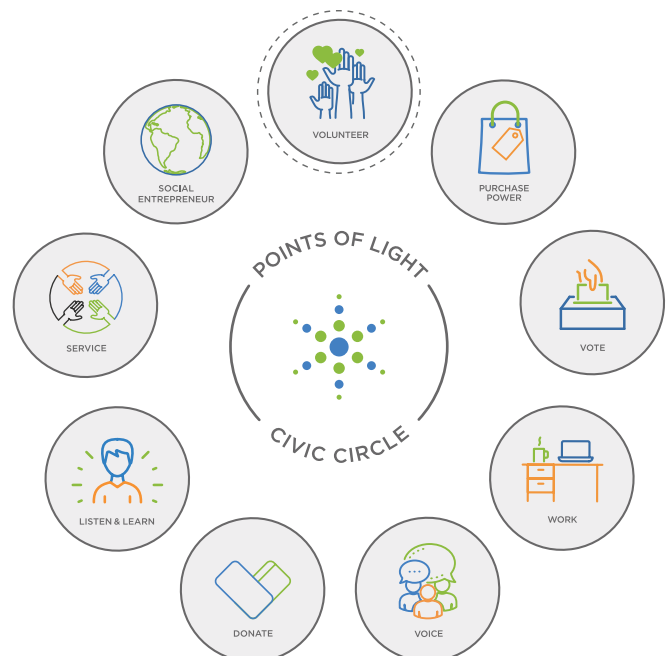


- Have you or someone you know thought about volunteering but never had a chance to? What are some of the barriers? What are small steps you can take (or encourage someone else to take) to start volunteering?
- Do you prefer to volunteer more “informally” in your neighborhood or at your place of worship, or more “formally” through a nonprofit organization? Why or why not?
- What was your first volunteer experience? How did that experience influence your decision to volunteer again?
- What has been the most meaningful volunteer experience you’ve ever had? What made it so meaningful to you?
- How would you influence others to volunteer?

WHAT NOW? WHAT NEXT?

- Learn about nonprofit organizations or other grassroots movements that are supporting the issues or causes you care about in your community or even nationally/globally.
- Join an opportunity to volunteer that aligns with your interests, values and availability.
- Invite others to join you.
- Volunteer is just one activity in the Points of Light Civic Circle that you can use to lead and lend support to causes you care about. To learn more, visit <https://pointsoflight.org/civiclif/>.

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The **Civic Circle** represents your power to lead, lend support and take action for causes you care about and to lead a civic life.