

# VOLUNTEER TO GET EXPERIENCE

A volunteer role can provide you with the opportunity to put into practice the theories you have learned at university, and provides a valuable service to the community at the same time.

## Find the right opportunity

There are numerous volunteer opportunities available. The key is to find a volunteer position that you would enjoy and are capable of doing. It's also important to make sure that your commitment matches the organisation's needs. The following questions can help you narrow your options:

- Do you prefer to work alone or as part of a team?
- Are you better behind the scenes or do you prefer to take a more visible role?
- How much time are you willing to commit?
- How much responsibility are you ready to take on?
- What skills can you bring to a volunteer job?
- What causes are important to you?



## Searching for volunteer work

Some organisations you could approach include: local clinics, hospitals, rehabilitation centres, schools, community and religious organisations, local government agencies, non-profit organisations, campus offices, faculty research projects and research laboratories.

Positions range from hotline counsellors, hospital and teacher's aides to political campaigners, legal aides and other paraprofessionals. Don't limit your volunteer search to these positions or organisations. Most organisations enthusiastically accept volunteers. Take the initiative – express your interest and offer your time.

Start with searching the following websites:

- **Volunteer at JCU**  
[www.jcu.edu.au/careers-and-employment/students/job-search/on-campus-opportunities](http://www.jcu.edu.au/careers-and-employment/students/job-search/on-campus-opportunities)
- **Volunteering North Queensland (Townsville)**  
<http://www.vnq.org.au/>
- **FNQ Volunteers (Cairns)**  
<http://fnqvolunteers.org.au/>
- **Go Volunteer**  
[www.govolunteer.com.au](http://www.govolunteer.com.au)
- **Volunteering Queensland**  
[www.volunteeringqld.org.au](http://www.volunteeringqld.org.au)
- **Conservation Volunteers Australia**  
<http://www.conservationvolunteers.com.au>
- **Qld Government information on Volunteering**  
<https://www.qld.gov.au/community/community-organisations-volunteering/volunteering/>
- **JCU CareerHub**  
<https://careerhub.jcu.edu.au/> (voluntary and paid work listed on CareerHub)

## Optimise volunteering

It's important to make sure that your volunteer position is a good fit and to communicate with the people you're working with in the volunteer organisation.

**Make sure you know what's expected.** Before starting, make sure you are comfortable with the organisation, know what is expected, and understand the time commitment. Consider starting small so that you don't over commit yourself at first. Give yourself some flexibility to change your focus if needed.

**Ask questions.** What key issues currently face the profession? How is the field changing? What ethical issues are of concern today?

In addition to learning what the typical day is like for these professionals, find out about the steps they took to reach their current role, and what tips they might have for you in gaining employment.



**Take the initiative.** Tactfully ask to do more, once you have effectively mastered your tasks, demonstrated competence and shown your dependability.

Volunteer for extra assignments, especially those that will increase your skills and knowledge in the field.

**Be professional.** Volunteer work should be taken seriously. You will be counted on to fill a special need. Be visible by doing your job well; actions speak louder than words. Develop and demonstrate “professionalism”; ethics, etiquette, and consideration of others; in your behaviour towards co-workers and clients; your communication (written, online and verbal); and in your dress, punctuality and general attitude

These qualities make a positive impression with the staff and may serve you well in the future when seeking referees.

**Don't be afraid to make a change.** Speak up if your experience isn't what you expected. Talk to the organisation about changing your focus or consider looking for another match.

## Record your experience

There are several methods for adding experience to your resume. The most common is to create a special section of your resume titled “Volunteer Work.” Be sure to offer specific information about the new skills that you have developed.

For example:

- “Organised and promoted blood drive which collected 35 litres of blood over a two-day event” - *Tells a potential employer what you did and how successful you were at it.*
- “Planned, ordered and prepared lunch and dinners to serve 350” - *Shows organisational skills.*

Remember to keep track of your volunteer projects, the skills you used to complete them, and quantifiable results.

### Source:

Adapted from the NACE Foundation Career Decision Pyramid with the permission of the NACE Foundation, copyright holder. Volunteering Queensland <https://volunteeringqld.org.au/volunteers/benefits-of-volunteering>

## Know your rights

Unlike paid workers, volunteer workers are not covered by award conditions or workplace agreements. But, volunteers do have rights, some of which are written into legislation.

As a volunteer you have the right to:

- accurate and truthful information about the organisation
- look at the organisation's volunteer policy and other policy documents affecting your work
- interviews and selection processes that are free of bias
- agreed working hours
- an agreed job description
- be properly trained to do the job
- a healthy and safe work environment
- be covered by adequate insurance provided by the organisation you work for
- reimbursement for any pre-agreed money you spend on behalf of the organisation in the course of your work
- effective grievance procedures
- not be used during an industrial dispute to perform work usually done by a paid worker
- confidentiality, your personal information being managed according to the *Privacy Act 1988*.

You can visit the [Fair Work Ombudsman](#) website for more information about your rights as a volunteer.

## Benefits for volunteers

Volunteering is all about making a difference in your community; it also benefits you personally as it offers the chance to:

- act on your values, passions and interests
- make new friendships and create professional networks
- gain work experience and learn new skills
- enjoy new social and cultural experiences
- develop personally and build confidence
- enjoy better physical and mental health as studies show volunteering makes us healthier and happier
- challenge yourself in a supportive environment
- help your community
- have fun!