

How To Plan A Youth–Led Volunteer Project

Audience: Youth volunteers (grade 7 and up), parents, teachers and others working with youth.

Are you a youth who wants to volunteer?

Planning your own volunteer project is a way to get involved with your community and to do something that is special and important to you.

Your project can be an event, activity or service that will benefit another person or organization. You can do your project alone or with others. When you plan a volunteer project, you can try something new and make it as unique as you are!

Steps to start your own volunteer project

Step 1: You get to choose **who** your project is for! What issues do you feel strongly about? Make a list of a few issues that are important to you and then pick one from that list. Some examples:

- work with children, seniors or animals
- support the search for a cure for diseases like cancer, diabetes or MS
- raise awareness of a community issue like famine, homelessness, poverty or women’s rights
- promote art, sports, education or community

Step 2: You get to choose **what** your project is going to be. Before you decide, ask yourself what you want your project to accomplish. Is it to fundraise, collect needed items or to create awareness or support? Your project may accomplish more than one goal, but it is best to start with just one main focus. Brainstorm a few project ideas and then pick the one that you like best.

- think about your skills, talents and how much time you have
- bake sales, carwashes and “a-thons” (i.e. wake-a-thons, dance-a-thons) are a good way to fundraise

- food/clothing/blanket/toy drive or collection can gather items needed for a certain cause
- remember that your project does not have to be 'big' to make a difference.

Step 3: Decide the **details** of your project.

- When is the best **time of year** to do your project? For example, if it is going to be outside, summer or spring would be better than winter.
- Where is your project **going to be held**? At the school, in the community or another location? Does the project need a special location or services? For example, a car wash would need to be outside, with lots of room and access to water.
- Do you need any **money** to get your project started? Where are you going to get the money? For example, you might need money to advertise your program or to buy supplies.
- Pick a **date and time** for your project. Does it need to be on the weekend, during school hours or after school? How much time do you need for it?

Step 4: Decide **what help** you will need and **who** you need to ask.

- Will you need help? If so, the people who help you will be your volunteer team or committee. Think about who would make good team members. Friends, family and teachers all make good volunteers!
- If your project is going to happen at school, do you need to ask permission? Think of teachers who might support your project and who could be your advisors, and then ask one!
- Will you need people to sponsor you or to give you donations?
 - Choose sponsors that have a connection to your project. For example, a pet store, rather than a children's clothing store, is more likely to sponsor a dog walk to raise money for the local animal shelter.
 - The best way to ask someone to sponsor your project is to approach them in person with your request in writing. Your donation request letter should include the reason for your project, your name and telephone number, who is involved and details of your project. Be clear on what you are asking them for.
 - Pick one team member to work on sponsors. It will get too confusing if too many people are looking for sponsors and donations.

Step 5: Get organized and get started on your project!

- Research your project idea. Look for similar projects that have happened in the past and get ideas from those. You may also check out local resources, like a volunteer centre or other agencies and contact them for more information.
- Make a to-do list or action plan and time line. Your action plan should include what needs to be done, how you will do it, who will do it and when it should be done by.
- Give yourself plenty of time to complete each task
- Stick to your time line or you may start to fall behind
- Have a contact list of your team members. Give out jobs from your to-do list to everyone.

Sample action plan and time line for a bake sale in November.
(Braden is the youth in charge. This is just a portion of an action plan and time line.)

Team member responsible	To do	How	Task needs to be done
Braden	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • decide who the bake sale is raising money for • decide where it will be held, and what day and time 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • research ideas, call for information • ask the Principal if we can use the school and what would be a good day 	September
Braden	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • choose team members • get a teacher advisor 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ask Dakota, Mike and Chris to be part of the team • ask Mr. Smith to be an advisor 	September
All	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • team meeting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • welcome everyone • divide duties 	Middle of September
Mike	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • create a budget 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • figure out all project costs • make a budget chart 	Middle of September
Dakota	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • get sponsors for poster material and baking supplies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • create a donation letter • ask grocery stores, material supply stores 	October
Chris & Braden	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • advertise for the bake sale • get a volunteer to bake 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • make posters to put up around the school • send out information in the school newsletter • ask for volunteer bakers in the advertisement 	Middle of October
All	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • team meeting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • check in • what still needs to be done? 	Middle of October

Check your action plan often. Be sure everything is being done when it should be, have regular team meetings, and always ask for help (from parents, teachers, volunteer centres and other community groups) if you need it!

Step 6: Complete your Project and evaluate it.

- Enjoy doing your project! Have fun with it! Feel proud to be involved in your community.
- Deliver the funds you raised or objects you collected to the agency you chose.
- When your project is done, evaluate how it went. Questions you can ask are:
 - Did your project accomplish what you wanted it to?
 - What parts of planning your project did you really enjoy?
 - What skills did you gain?
 - How did you feel about it?
 - What would you change if you were going to do your project again?
 - Who else might have been involved?
 - Were your goals realistic?

Step 7: Thank everyone!

- Saying thank you can be the most important part of your project!
- If you were to do another project, they are more likely to help you again if you thanked them the first time.
- Don't forget to thank everyone: volunteers, team members, family, friends, teachers, sponsors and agency helpers.
- Thank-you ideas—always do at least one!
 - Send thank you cards or letters by mail, in person or by email.
 - Verbally thank them.
 - Give small gifts, if you have the funds.
 - Certificates.
 - A get-together, barbeque or thank-you dinner.

References and Resources

Alberta Advanced Education and Career Development (1998). *Volunteering: How to Build Your Career by Helping Others*. Edmonton, AB: Alberta: Queens Publisher.

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