



Starting Your Own Volunteer Project

Getting Started

While no two projects will be the same, successful projects will share a few common practices. We encourage you to incorporate the following elements into your service project:

- Create a team with your friends and neighbors to share the effort
- Set outcome-based goals and track your progress to those goals
- Celebrate your successes together

The Challenge: Many community-based organizations do not have enough capacity to manage a large number of volunteers, so they need you to organize yourself in coordination with them. This tool kit is designed to either help you organize a group and be a positive addition to a community-based organization, or, if such an organization does not exist, to be a well-organized, independently-run group that fills a needed gap in the community.

A step by step guide to getting started and executing service activities follows.

Step One: IDENTIFY LOCAL NEEDS

No one knows your community better than you and your neighbors do. Take proactive steps to address the challenges you see daily and generate solutions that work in your neighborhood. Whether you and your team decide to partner with the local library to refurbish reading rooms or to organize meal distribution at a community center, you already have the resources you need to get started.

- Speak with your [volunteer connector organization](#) and find out what's already happening in your community. If you see a service gap, consider creating your own project.
- Brainstorm with friends and local leaders about what your community most needs.
- Conduct a needs assessment by mapping resources, holding focus groups, or distributing a survey.

Step Two: BUILD A TEAM

Teams can help share the work, motivate members, and hold each other accountable. Teams build community. Ask your family, friends, colleagues, neighbors, and faith group members to serve with you. Teams can be made up of a group of businesses or organizations that all believe in the same cause. Consider Schools, Community-Based Organizations, Volunteer Centers, Government Agencies, and Businesses.

- Host a house meeting or pot luck to choose a project, set goals, recruit volunteers, and plan next steps.

- Post your service activity through your [local connector organization](#) to recruit new volunteers.

Step Three: SET A GOAL

Set a service goal and hold yourself accountable. Commit as individuals and as a team to making a measurable impact. Set your goals high to stretch yourself. Then keep track of how you are doing and designate someone to be responsible for updating the group on how you are progressing toward your goals. You'll be surprised at how much you can do when you commit, focus, and follow through.

- As an individual, I will _____this month/season/year.
- As a team, we will _____this month/season/year.

Step Four: SERVE YOUR COMMUNITY

The key to effective service is planning. Organize your materials, make confirmation calls and, if you have time, read supplemental materials before you volunteer. Get out there and make things happen. Today is your day, sometimes there will be stumbling blocks along the way, but if you remind yourself and your team why you got into serving, the service will come easier and the solutions will present themselves.

- Set clear expectations and achievable goals.
- Routinely tell stories about what these goals mean & why your team members in particular matter for reaching these goals.
- Strategize with team members (ask for suggestions, feedback on process).
- Give all team members meaningful decisions to make about how they will meet their goals.
- Motivate people into action. We're all naturally afraid when trying something new, but we learn much more from getting on the bike and falling off and trying again than we'll ever learn from talking about riding the bike.
- Allow your team to make mistakes. Evaluate often so you can learn from your failures as well as successes.
- When presented with problems and questions, ask for suggestions and solutions (rather than dwelling on problems or giving the solution yourself).
- Be open and honest. Share stories about your past failures as well as accomplishments. People are more receptive when they can learn through your failures as well as your success stories.
- Stay positive, acknowledge challenges, and focus on solutions.

Step Five: REPORT AND CELEBRATE SUCCESSES

Your team members and the community want to know about your successes and hear your stories. Share your accomplishments by reporting your results.

- Celebration and Recognition. Make sure to celebrate your project. You can do this through simple thank you calls or cards, you can hold an event, such as a pizza party to

recognize all those who helped. People like to know that what they did was important and helped the community.

- Be sure to write thank you notes to the people and businesses who contributed cash or made other donations to your project.
- Reflection and Evaluation. It's important to understand what you did through your service, both for yourself and for your community. Think about what you learned through the project. For example, has your attitude about homelessness changed after working in a soup kitchen? What did you learn about yourself? Did you know you could teach before tutoring a younger child?

Original content found via the [Utah Commission on Service & Volunteerism](#).