

Volunteer Opportunities

Factors to Consider in Choosing a Volunteer Experience

Volunteering is one of the best ways to gain experience in a field you are interested in pursuing. Almost all volunteer efforts build skills in communication, motivation and teamwork and, occasionally, will provide you with a good reference. The important component of a volunteer experience as it relates to a career decision is your ability to test the water and see if you are truly motivated to pursue a career in this area. Think carefully about the type of experience you want and whether or not it will provide you with skills you may be lacking, while also challenging you to define your interests and develop realistic professional goals.

Questions To Consider

- Is the work related to a field in which I am interested?
- Are the volunteer opportunities offered relevant to my professional goals?
- Is the agency responsive to individual needs of volunteers?
- Does the agency provide training?
- Does the agency supervise the work of volunteers?

Characteristics of a Good Volunteer

- *Take initiative and be a problem-solver.* Look for ways to improve the effectiveness of the program and ask for opportunities to do more.
- *Have a sense of direction.* Know what you want to accomplish and find out how to most effectively make that happen.
- *Let your volunteer supervisor know your career goals.* When the supervisor knows what most interests you, they may be better able to offer experiences to satisfy those interests.
- *Learn what career you want to pursue.* Use your volunteer experience to gather ideas about the kind of career you may wish to pursue.
- *Take advantage of training.* Many volunteer experiences offer specific training courses so always take advantage of those opportunities to further your skills.
- *Be consistent, responsible and dependable.* Show up on time, fulfill your responsibilities in an effective manner – your supervisor may be a good source for writing a recommendation letter one day.
- *Learn from challenges.* Always ask yourself what you can learn from any experience you may encounter while volunteering.
- *Be flexible.* Your volunteer experience may not always be what you expected. Be willing to do what needs to be done and learn what you can.

Basic Guidelines for Volunteering in Specific Graduate Professions:

- *Dentistry* – observation/participation in patient care, general dentistry practice. Additional observation in specialty practice is always welcome. A recommendation letter from a dental professional will be expected.
- *Medicine* – direct patient/client contact is desirable. Any volunteer experience that shows dedication and commitment in service to others. Transport opportunities are medically related if they give the volunteer an opportunity to establish a rapport with a person who is sick and needs your assistance.
- *Optometry* – observation/participation in patient care, general optometry practice. Additional observation in specialty practice is always welcome.
- *Osteopathic Medicine* – observation/participation in patient care and direct patient/client care is desirable. Shadowing an osteopathic medical professional is required.
- *Pharmacy* – experience in a pharmacy environment highly desirable.
- *Physical Therapy* – experience in a health care setting, particularly a physical therapy environment.
- *Public Health* – experience in health education, advocacy or social service delivery situation is valuable. The Peace Corps and Americorps volunteers often gain extensive exposure to public health issues.
- *Veterinary Medicine* – knowledge and interest in the veterinary medical profession, experience with veterinarians and with the care and responsible management of animals is required. Recommendations from veterinary professionals describing your ability to work with animals is most important. Many times several years of animal exposure are required.