



Make A Difference Day
...Be One Among Millions

Volunteer Project Toolkit

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Guide Overview

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October 22, 2011

What is Make A Difference Day?

Make A Difference Day is the most encompassing national day of helping others -- a celebration of neighbors helping neighbors. Everyone can participate. Created by USA WEEKEND Magazine, Make A Difference Day is an annual event that takes place on the fourth Saturday of every October.

This toolkit was developed for volunteer leaders like you to learn how to create high impact, well-managed projects that will have a positive impact in your community on Make A Difference Day. The toolkit will give you the basics to organize your own service project on October 22, 2011.

The content in this guide is organized into action-orientated chapters that will help you work within the community to meet needs, plan & manage projects, and develop a framework for projects. The toolkit does not set how your project should be structured; it does provide pointers and connects you to tools and resources you can adapt to meet your needs. While no two projects will be the same, successful projects will share a few common practices.

The toolkit is designed to either help you organize a group and be a positive additional to a community based organization, or, to be a well-organized independently-run group that fills a needed gap in the community.

In addition, a mini grant opportunity is available to assist with materials and supplies for volunteer efforts that are organized using this toolkit as a framework.

Step 1: Focus on Your Community

Overview

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. What are the needs of local nonprofit organizations, schools, or other community areas? By working together, you can identify projects that will make a true impact in your community.

Goals

- Work within the community to identify your community's issues or needs.
- Discover avenues for finding a project:
 - Search Serve.gov, Volunteermatch.org, and Handsonphoenix.org to find out what service activities are already happening in your community.
 - [Visit the Corporation for National and Community Service](#) website for suggested service activities.
 - Identify local partners; Check out the organizations already doing good work in your area. Many existing service groups have identified community needs.
 - Brainstorm with friends and local leaders about what your community needs the most. If you see a service gap, consider creating your own project.

Tools: Project Ideas

- Service Project Idea Sheet

You may already have a passion for a particular issue, such as education, homelessness or the environment. However, assessment of your community's needs is still an important part of designing your service project. Assessing community needs can be as simple as taking a walk through your neighborhood. The important thing is to focus on the community when identifying what is needed. Some ideas for assessing your communities needs include a brainstorming session with other community members or conducting an informal survey of community members to help identify needs or issues.

Step 2: Narrow Your Scope

Overview

While assessing your community needs, you identified a community issue that you would like to focus your service on. Now it is time to narrow your scope so that you can develop a project that is effective and manageable.

Goals

- Research the community issues
- Identify project partner(s)
- Do a site visit
- Receive permission to work on private property
- Decide on a project

Tools

- Service Project Site Visit Checklist
- Private Property Permission Form
- Sample Private Property Permission Request Letter

Researching the Issue

The first step in narrowing your focus is to learn more about the issue you identified. You will need some ideas for projects that will help to address the needs of your community. Research who (ex: non-profit organizations, religious groups, neighborhood associations or other civic groups) is already working in this area. Are they meeting all of the needs already? If so, you may want to focus your efforts on another issue.

Partnering with a Community Service Organization

Once you know what groups in our community are working in a particular area, you can approach them about partnering for a project. The community based organization may not have enough capacity to manage a large number of volunteers on October 22nd, so they may need you to organize yourself in coordination with them. Be prepared to lead an independently run volunteerism effort if needed.

Conducting a Site Visit

Take time to visit the potential project site to determine the greatest needs. A site visit will help you to identify potential projects. During the visit, ask questions that help you understand what the greatest needs are and the ways that one-time volunteer support can have the greatest impact. Keep in mind the following elements of a successful project:

- Will the work completed make a difference to the persons served or community?
- Is the project volunteer-friendly?
- Will volunteers be utilized effectively during the project?
- Are special skills required?
- What kinds of supplies are needed? Who will provide supplies?
- Can this project be completed in your project time frame?

- Will significant prep work be needed prior to the project? Who will complete this?

You might be hoping to organize a large event for a high number of volunteers but find yourself with a project that can't provide enough work for everyone. During the site visit, you can explore ways to expand the project. You should write down any ideas you have and discuss them with your team and project partners. Think about limitations of working with volunteers on the project, budget and time constraints for tools and materials.

Deciding on a Project

Once you have assessed the needs, researched the issue, contacted partners and visited the prospective service site, it is time to decide on the project. Projects can vary greatly, so it is important to define your scope. This will dictate how large or small the project will be, the number of volunteers, intended impact, and theme of project.

When selecting a project keep in mind:

- Required time to completed project
- Overall project scope
- Cost
- Weather
- Accessibility
- Skilled labor needed
- When deciding on a project you also should have written approval, if working on private property, from the property owner. You can use the *Private Property Permission From* and *Sample Private Property Permission Request Letter* tool as a guide.

Step 3: Map Your Project

Overview

As you narrow the scope of your project and determine what you are going to do, you will need to decide how you can achieve your goals. In order to have a successful volunteer projects, you will need to plan all of the details in advance.

Goals

- Create a task list
- Design a project map
- Plan for reflection and evaluation

Tools

- Project Planning Worksheet
- Project Supply List Worksheet
- Project Task List Worksheet

Creating a Task List

Part of the planning process is identifying the tasks involved to complete the projects. Create a list of the assignments and the number of volunteers needs for each task. If you have multiple goals, prioritize them according to importance.

See the sample Project Task List Worksheet.

Project Mapping

An important part of developing your project is determining the resources you need to complete the project, included human, material, financial and educational.

Human Resources

Determine the number of volunteers you need to complete your identified tasks. Consider the following:

- Volunteer skill levels
- Volunteer age limits
- Duration of project
- Availability of supplies
- Physical space available to perform the work

Materials and Financial Resources

Determine what supplies, materials, goods and services you need in order to complete your project. Make your list as comprehensive as possible, including resources for every aspect of the project-from nametags and refreshments for volunteers to tools and restroom facilities.

Work with your volunteers and project partners, if you have one, to secure resources at no cost. Think about businesses, community members and other organizations that may be ideal for securing elements needed for the project.

While in-kind contributions will assist you in completing your service project, some items will require financial resources. As you list the supplies and materials needed for the project, note the ones that have a cost associated with them. How will you secure the resources needed to cover these costs?

A mini grant opportunity is available, to those that are organized using this toolkit as a framework, through the City of Mesa Neighborhood Outreach Department. The mini grant is available to assist with materials and supplies for volunteer efforts taking place on October 22nd, 2011. See the *Make a Difference Day Mini-Grant Guidelines and Application* for more information.

Educational Resources

Consider how you will orient and train the volunteers who are working on the project. Volunteer orientations can be conducted prior to the project or included as part of the events on the actual day of service.

Orientations should provide a brief overview of the community issue that is being addressed by the project and/or a brief history of the issue. Include an outline of the project and what volunteers will be doing during the project so that everyone knows what to expect and what is expected of them.

You may need to train volunteers for the work they will be doing. If volunteers are prepared for the project, they will feel more comfortable with the work, the project will run more smoothly and your team is more likely to achieve its goals.

Plan for the resources you will need to orientate and train volunteers for your project such as:

- Time
- Location
- Facilitators
- Instruction Materials

Planning for Reflection and Evaluation

Reflection and evaluation are important parts of your service project. Reflection is a process where volunteers can think about and sometimes share their personal experiences. Reflection can be as simple as sitting in a circle with all of your volunteers, or breaking up into small groups, at the end of the project to share experiences or insights.

Evaluation is intended to assess the project. Evaluation are often a written set of questions the volunteers can provide feedback on related to the project and can be done as part of the project at the end, or collected electronically with an email or web-posted evaluation. Evaluations are particularly helpful if you plan to do more projects in the future.

You should take time before the project to plan how you will incorporate reflection and evaluation into your service activity. Additional resources are available for Reflection and Evaluation in section 7.

Step 4: Securing Resources

Overview

Now that you have selected the project that your group will be working on and what you will need to complete the project, how will you secure the items you need? Having enough volunteers is the key to the success of your project. You also need to make sure you have the materials and financial resources to accomplish your goals.

Goals

- Recruit volunteers
- Acquire funding, products and services

Recruiting Volunteers

To complete your project you will need volunteers. You have already determined the number of volunteers you need to fill specific positions, now it's time to work on recruiting them. If you are in need of additional volunteers to support your project consider displaying recruitment information through the Internet, community bulletin boards, restaurants and other high-traffic places.

Funding, Products & Services

There are numerous ways you can obtain funding, products and services for your project. Grants, gifts and donations are great ways to get support from individuals, corporations and community organizations. Think about who you already have a connection with.

Below are some basic ideas on ways you can gain resources for your service project

- Businesses
- Colleges & Universities
- Faith Groups
- Foundations
- Neighborhood Associations & Civic Groups
- Nonprofit Organizations

Think about developing a strategy for approaching someone about donating money, services or in-kind goods. Start by identifying the correct people to contact (store managers, etc) and present your case for why the project is important, who it serves, and how they can help support your service opportunity. Be specific about what your needs are and how they can help.

Step 5: Finalize Your Project Plan

Overview

Take time to carefully review your project plan to make sure that everything is taken care of ahead of time.

Goals:

- Complete the project plan
- Volunteer communication and registration
- Plan for safety
- Plan for fun

Tools

- Pre-Project Checklist
- Project Sign In Sheet
- Sample Project Timeline

Completing Your Project Plan

Use the *Pre-Project Checklist* tool to help you confirm all aspects of your projects in the weeks before your event.

Volunteer Communication & Registration

It is a good idea to pre-register volunteers. Collect a contact name, number and email for all volunteers. If volunteers register you will be able to contact them about projects details.

Make sure you confirm project details with all parties. Contact volunteers with a phone call or email that:

- Introduces yourself (or another volunteer leader) as the project leader
- Thanks them for volunteering
- Provides the dates/time of the project, site address, directions, and parking information.
- Describes the volunteer activity
- Explains attire
- Encourages volunteers to bring supplies they may have
- Tells volunteers who to contact if they have a change in plans.

On the day of your service project have a designated area for volunteer check in. You can use the *Project Sign-In Sheet* tool as a guide.

Safety

Review your project for possible hazards. Review the safety plan with your project leaders. Assign a safety point person for the day of the event. Always have a first aid kit on hand.

Plan for Fun

You want your volunteers to leave the project with a feeling that they worked hard, made a difference, and had fun! Here are fun ideas on how to make your project enjoyable for the volunteers:

- Music
- Warm-Up Exercises
- Nametags or Group Names
- Keynote Speaker from your Partner Organization
- Volunteer Cheerleader
- Reflection

Step 6: Manage Your Project

Overview

As the project manager, you will need to balance the logistics, time and people in relation to your project.

Goals

- Discuss how to manage time while on-site
- Learn how to set the tone for a safe day

Tools

- Volunteer Incident Report Form

Managing Time

The first 30 minutes of most projects seem a little chaotic. As the project leader you can play the key role in providing volunteer leaders to help people get acclimated to their task and becoming familiar with the site. This enables you to monitor the progress at the project and make adjustment accordingly. As the leader you should not get absorbed into doing the project yourself. You are there to assess the ongoing needs of the volunteers and ensure all of the work you intended to complete gets done, and gets done well.

Safety

Ensuring the safety of your volunteers is critical. Review your project for possible hazards and educate volunteers on safety.

General Project Safety Information

- Wear and reapply sunscreen if outside
- Drink plenty of water
- Wear appropriate safety attire such as gloves, goggles, dust masks, etc
- Watch out for sharp or dangerous objects such as broken glass
- When storing tools make sure to place sharp edges down
- Clean equipment before you leave
- Make sure children are supervised at all times
- If using a ladder, make sure that it is set up properly and have a spotter
- Be on the lookout for poisonous insects
- Turn rocks away from you, not towards you (in case there are critters under them)
- Do not wander way from the project and stay in a group
- Report all incidents to your team leader immediately

It is a good idea to document any incidents that occur during your service project. Please see the sample *Incident Report Form* as a guide.

Step 7: Wrap Up Your Project

Overview

Now that you have done most of the planning for your project it is time to think about concluding your project.

Goals

- Outline steps for post-project clean up
- Assess all project tasks
- Learn how to recognize volunteers for their efforts
- Discuss reflection and how to connect volunteers to the project
- Understand evaluation

At the end of the project, make sure to address the following:

Clean Up

You always want to leave your project site cleaner than it was when you arrived. Here are some steps to assist:

- Collect and dispose of any food-related trash and items on the ground. Bag it and dispose of it properly.
- Empty any unused, un-reusable products into proper containers and throw them away.
- Break down the registration area and break areas.
- Collect the sign in sheets or any other signed forms for your documentation.
- Make sure no personal belongings are left on site.
- Collect all of your safety items for re-use (if possible).
- Do a final walk through of the site.

Assess

Just as you did the initial site visit to determine what needed to be done, walk through your project site to review the work and ensure all tasks have been completed. If something was not completed make a plan for completing it at a later date, or work with your project partners to ensure all parties are satisfied with the level of completion.

Recognition

At the end of the project, take time to recognize your volunteers. However, don't forget to recognize volunteer contributions throughout the project. The most important way to recognize volunteers is to treat them with respect and give them praise throughout the project.

Reflection

Take a moment at the end of the project to lead your volunteers through a reflection conversation. Ask them to reflect on their experiences and thoughts about the project and how their work affects the community they served. This leads to more effective volunteerism and you are giving the volunteers an opportunity to create a stronger sense of accomplishment and connection to the community.

Sample Reflection Questions:

- What issue(s) is being addressed?
- What did you think about during the project activity?
- What affect do you think this activity has had on those intended to benefit from it?
- How has your volunteerism affected you?
- How did your efforts help?
- What more needs to be done to improve these problems?

Evaluation and Feedback

Evaluation allows you the opportunity to get feedback about the volunteer project. Do not hesitate to ask your project leaders, volunteers or partners for their feedback in regards to the work that was done, planning, delivery, implementation, logistics and management. To get feedback, ask those involved to complete a feedback form at the end of the project before everyone leaves.

A Sample *Evaluation Survey* Tool is included to assist you in this process.

Summary

We look forward to you working together in your community to create meaningful service opportunities for Make a Difference Day. Your team members, the community and the City of Mesa want to know about your successes and hear your stories. Share your accomplishments and service with us October 22nd on [Facebook](#) at <http://www.facebook.com/CityofMesa> or [Twitter](#) at [@MesaAzgov](#).

All information that is included in this toolkit, including sample forms, is intended to serve as a guide in assisting you with planning your project for Make a Difference Day.

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