

Tips for finding the perfect volunteer experience

There are many volunteer assignments available and you should take your time to find the one that best matches your career aspirations. Start by thinking about the following questions:

- ***What cause or issues matter the most to me?***

Are there specific issues that you are passionate about supporting? (e.g. youth mentoring, mental health, etc.)

- ***What specific skills and expertise am I looking to use or gain as a volunteer?***

Your volunteer experience can help boost your career, but you have to ensure it is within your field of choice and in line with your passion.

- ***What time commitment can I make?***

E.g. Are you looking for a short-term commitment or a long-term opportunity?

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Where Should You Volunteer?

As a student you are limited to areas around your school. Be it the hospital, a credit union, an NGO or Newspaper. Think of your career choice, and apply to an organization or institution in your locality that will help you gain skills needed to boost yourself into that career path.

As a graduate you have the choice to go further out of your region. You can volunteer in bigger organizations and institutions like UN agencies (UNICEF, UNHCR, UNDP, UN-Women etc.) and International Development Organizations (Plan, Care, CDC etc.) which are based in the nation's capital- Yaoundé. You might also apply for international volunteering projects via the African Union Youth Division.

Wherever you decide to volunteer, apply well in advance keeping in mind when you want to begin, allowing for the minimum amount of time for your application to be processed. Also note that bigger organizations require previous experience even for volunteer roles. So the more volunteer experience you have at a local level, the better.



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A Better Alternative?

If you are a typical Cameroonian youth, this is the run down on your life.:

You are born; you go to nursery school, primary school, secondary school, high-school, university and then after graduating with all these certificates you join the thousands out there looking for a job. They tell you: welcome to *chomencam*- the illusionary company of unemployment where non-workers walk their shoes to death “hustling”.

This is your life. But this should not be.

Yes, there should be jobs, but then even if there are jobs,

what tells you that you are qualified for them? You may say “I have certificates” , yet in our competitive society you need a lot more than

Often when applying for a job, a requirement is a certain amount of working experience. And the fresh graduate of chomencam wonders how he/she is ever going to get working experience if he/she does not get the job first.

Volunteer

that to impress. Don't get me wrong I am not belittling education. Those certificates are necessary, very necessary. But they are not enough. The job market needs more, specifically work experience. I'm sure you've heard it before; they demand previous job experience but no one is willing to employ to enable you get the experience. So how do you do it? Here we present volunteering as the better alternative.

Why Volunteering?

To volunteer is to opt to undertake a job or offer your service for little or no monetary payment. You may ask: “why would anyone want to work for no pay?” For the same reason you go to school - to learn.

You see, when you volunteer you are actually paying for your learning with your labor rather than with fees as you do with a school. By volunteering, you gain professional experience, and practice at putting your knowledge to use. In general we should volunteer because the benefits abound., they include:

1- Gaining Job Experience.

With volunteering you gain professional experience which cannot be taught in the classroom, Some things are learned only in practice.

2- Meeting Real Community Needs.

Volunteering is the easiest way to be a part of national development. By volunteering with a Community Based Organization, you become conscientious of your peoples' needs and are actively working at making things better.

3- Gaining Entrance to College.

Volunteering noted on your CV or a motivational letter improves your chances at getting a scholarship and entry into graduate schools. Sometimes even more than your grade point average.

4- Establishing Networks

By volunteering you “put yourself out there”. You open yourself to networking, to know and be known. The people you work with will contribute to your professional development either by counseling or recommending you..

5- Gain New Skills and Develop Talents.

In the course of volunteering you will most likely learn new skills and find that what you thought was the right career for you may be the wrong one. It is a process of self discovery and personal growth.

When Should You Volunteer?

The best time to volunteer is while still a student. It is very possible with time management to work and go to school. If you can volunteer briefly during the long holidays of high-school then you may be able to test yourself as to what career appeals to you most.

While in the university you may begin volunteering from your first year; either alongside going to school or during the long holidays. With the experience gleaned over the course of three to four years of your undergraduate degree, you would have gathered a great deal of experience to make for an impressive CV by graduation. Most importantly, the accumulated work experience will offer you confidence and practical know-how alongside your degree knowledge to enable you to be better equipped for job interviews or encourage you to become an entrepreneur yourself.

However if your program is already too strenuous for you, or if extra work might affect your GPA, you may take a year after school to volunteer in one or two places.

At this time volunteering ought to last at least six months for effectiveness and credibility.