

COMMUNITY SERVICE LEARNING CENTER

"Is it really that important to place my volunteer activities on the resume?"

"Do employers really care about volunteering?"

"Should I even bother with talking about the service I did?"

Yes!

Presenting Volunteer Experience on a Resume

By definition, a resume describes the uniqueness of a job seeker to others, reflecting the applicant's work experience, goals and capabilities. But what does a description of the individual's skills and experiences as a volunteer say to an employer? It says that this prospective employee is willing to try new experiences, be involved in community, and will take initiative and make things happen! Volunteer experience requires strategic placement in a resume. Too many people incorrectly feel that a resume must only discuss paid work history; they spend 90% of the space on that, relegating everything else to a closing section headed "Other Interests" or possibly "Community Work."

There are two options for where to place volunteer experience on a resume:

- In a traditional, chronological style resume, present volunteer experiences along with paid work in reverse date order (most recent experience first). This is a preferred format to highlight that the person has been doing many things since their last paid job. It is also appropriate for students seeking their first "real" job, since it places their valuable volunteer/internship experience front and center, rather than low-level jobs without any professional relevance.
- Separate paid work experience from volunteer work experience. This presentation highlights how the job seeker has demonstrated valuable skills in each category.

And remember: Volunteer work should be presented with the same value, importance and level of achievement as paid work. To emphasize this, consider these resume-writing suggestions:

- Prepare a service statement. This summary includes volunteer position title, a description of duties and responsibilities, skills required, dates of service, number of hours contributed and training received. Also include evaluation of performance and contribution to the organization; in-service training; workshops and conferences attended.
- Numbers stop the eye and reinforce the value of the volunteer experience. Employers want to know quantifiable results as well as skills. Explain the outcome of your work with some data: amount of money raised, number of clients helped, percentage of successful interventions, etc. You can also assign a dollar value to volunteer hours in each assignment, so that volunteers can point to the equivalent monetary worth of their contributions.

Additional Tips for Successful Resumes

Here are six more ideas to develop resumes that get the interviews you desire:

1. Write the resume in a quick-to-read style. Use bullets so the eye of the reader works easily down the page.
2. Always target the resume to a specific position or employer. There is no such thing as a one-size-fits-all resume.
3. When targeting a resume to a particular company, research how much emphasis the company places on community service and philanthropy. The depth of the description of the volunteer work should mirror the results of your research. If a company supports a specific issue or cause, see whether the volunteer efforts match in any way. This can make the candidate even more appealing because of familiarity with or a growing interest in the company's cause.
4. Include relevant volunteer and service experience on any job application form and do not be deterred if there is a space on the form for "salary." Describe the experience and fill in this space with the word "unsalaried." Once you have landed an interview, bring up relevant volunteer activities during the conversations with potential employers. Here is your opportunity to emphasize your accomplishments and leadership skills.
5. Word things in a neutral way without indicating alliance with religion, political party or controversial issue. Only mention political or religious affiliation if the position targeted depends upon this kind of information.
6. The magic word for anything that is included in the resume is RELEVANCY. Does the volunteer experience described in the resume fit the needs of the company and/or directly apply to the particular job the candidate most wants? As you craft your resume, keep samples on file to share with new volunteers. Over time, collectively, you will develop strong presentations that do not have to be reinvented and only need minor editing for each individual.

More Information

- The information on this page was excerpted with permission from Vol. IX, Issue 3, 2009 of *e-Volunteerism: The Electronic Journal of the Volunteer Community*. For the full text and other helpful articles, visit their website at www.e-volunteerism.com.
- The article, Volunteer Experience Makes a Difference in this Job Market: How to Present Volunteer Activities on a Resume, is by Louise Polis, Career Pro Resume Center. Visit her website at www.wewritersumes.com.
- The article can also be found in the Energize website library at www.energizeinc.com/art.html.
- You can also contact the Grand Valley Career Services office to schedule an appointment for a resume review. Their website is www.gvsu.edu/careers.