

Ten Ways to Volunteer on Your Own Schedule

By: [Kathleen J. King](#) ([View Profile](#))

No matter how many items I check off my list, undoubtedly, the list continues to grow. I'm always running out of time, so offering my time feels downright daunting. But with a little creativity and research, I'm finding that it is possible to give back. There are plenty of volunteer opportunities out there. It's just a matter of finding one that I like—and fits my schedule.

Here are a few ideas if you're interested in volunteering but have a busy schedule.

1. Know Thyself and Ask Yourself

- How much time do I really have?
- Am I super social or want to be alone, or both?
- Stay local or travel?
- Do I want to work offsite, at home, or both?
- Who do I want to serve and why?
- Will I create my own opportunity or volunteer with an established group?
- What do I want to get in return from the experience? (The answer might be simple: it just feels good.)

2. Be Realistic About Your Time and Improvise

The more you enjoy what you're doing, the less it will feel like "time." That said, certain kinds of volunteer opportunities may require more time than others. Some organizations require their volunteers to come to meetings once a month, yet much can be done offsite at your own home on your own schedule. For example, I have a friend who works for a state park nonprofit, which only requires him to be at a meeting once a month for two hours. Most of the work he does is at home by phone and email, so he volunteers at his leisure. But if you're interested in teaching kids to read, it might mean volunteering onsite at a school, once a week, during the work day. If you can't commit to it, think more broadly about literacy; start a book swap at your local church, community center, or school. Or start a book drive for underserved classroom libraries, foster homes, prisons, mental health facilities, and homeless shelters. Or simply read to someone you know.

3. Think Local

Check out local bulletin boards and ask family, colleagues, and friends how you might contribute. Networking will help you find those once-a-year events that interest you. Local libraries, hospitals, schools, homeless shelters, social service agencies, youth centers, food banks, political headquarters, nature centers, parks, and nonprofits are probably nearby and may need volunteers only once a month or a few times a year.

4. Do Your Research

A search on databases like Idealist or VolunteerMatch can yield amazing results, or can provide ideas that you can then decide to pursue locally. Handy with a hammer or just willing to learn? On VolunteerMatch, I found many volunteer jobs that last one week in places like New Orleans. Or consider joining an established organization like [Habitat for Humanity](#). They estimate that 1,000 volunteers are needed per week to keep up with their construction pace in the Gulf Coast. You can also hunt for ideas on the UN Online Volunteering

Service and Network for Good. Check out your local library, too, for specific volunteer opportunities. If you're willing to go abroad, books such as *World Volunteers (3rd Edition): The World Guide to Humanitarian and Development Volunteering*, offer short- and long-term projects.

5. Volunteer on Vacation

Give back to a place you've visited, meet travelers like yourself, or just do something you like to do anyway. Instead of just seeing the coral reefs in the Caribbean—help protect them! Books such as *Volunteer: A Traveler's Guide to Making a Difference Around the World (Lonely Planet General Reference)* will get you focused.

6. Volunteer on Company Time

Increasingly companies are giving back and recruiting their employees to donate time—all on the company's dime. [Make a Difference Day](#) takes place on the fourth Saturday of every October in the U.S. (though several multinational corporations as well as the U.S. military stationed overseas volunteer time as well). Volunteers who are noticed for outstanding work receive awards, charitable donations, and media coverage in *USA WEEKEND* Magazine during National Volunteer Week in April. Employees of Banco Popular have participated in Make a Difference Day for the past six years. In central Florida, employees worked with the Central Florida Miracle League: youth baseball for children with disabilities. During the game, each child is assigned a volunteer (or buddy) to get to know.

7. Keep It Simple

There is a young man in my town who volunteers his time finding old bikes and repairing them for area nonprofits, community centers, foster homes, and after-school programs. He then throws a party once a year at a local bar to raise money for needy children.

8. Make an Impact When You Truly Can

So many of us have unpredictable schedules and think it's just not possible to commit any time at all. But [Charity Guide](#) recognizes this and offers what they call a Volunteer on Demand approach. You can choose your project based on how much time you have to give. Fifteen minutes? One hour? They have a job for you. Their site is chock full of creative ideas for those truly strapped for time.

9. Volunteer to Meet More People

For many of us, it's not all about going to heaven. You might not have a lot of extra time, but you do want to socialize. Volunteering is one way to meet new friends, date, or network. [One Brick](#) recognizes that some volunteers prefer a more social and flexible volunteer environment. Events are usually three to four hours, and afterward volunteers meet up at restaurants or cafes where they get to know other volunteers.

10. Give Advice from Your Armchair

Virtual volunteering has taken off. If you can't be there, be virtually there. Many organizations look for those with experience in social entrepreneurship; research, writing, fundraising, or marketing; mentoring youth and sharing wisdom online; and promoting legislation. They also look for professionals in law, journalism, public health, and medicine. Organizations such as Naburr.com, Ashoka.org, icouldbe.org, Operation Hope, Lawyers Without Borders, and Red Cross Virtual Journalists Program, are just the tip of the virtual volunteering iceberg.

Related Story: [Through You, I Am a Gem](#)

Updated August 26, 2008

First published November 2007

Find this article at:

<http://www.divinecaroline.com/22347/39337-ten-ways-volunteer-own-schedule>