



Volunteer Guide:

The 10 Things Volunteer-Driven Organizations Want You to Know!

EMU Students have so much to offer the community and we want your interactions and time to be as effective as possible in creating positive change. There is a lot at stake here for you, the organization, and the community being served. Thank you so much for thoughtfully engaging with an open mind before you begin this important work!

1. Contacting & Communicating with Community Partners

So you're ready to start volunteering? It's time to contact the organization! When you make that initial contact, remember a few things:

- This is your first impression, be professional. Be thoughtful about how you write the email or what you say over the phone.
 - Email: Your email should be addressed to a specific person and should be signed by you. Be sure to use proper grammar, punctuation, and spelling.
 - Phone Call: Practice your phone conversation with a friend before calling. Think through who you will ask to speak to, what questions you will ask, and what information you hope to gain from the call.
- Be clear about your plans and intentions
 - What days and times are you available? Remember, they might not have opportunities during your availability.
 - What is your level of commitment? How long can you commit? Be honest about this from the beginning.
- Non-profit and organization employees are busy! If you don't hear back right away don't take it personally. Try to reach them by both phone and email.

2. Find a Good Fit

Start by looking at organizations' websites to get a feel for them and to see if they have volunteer opportunities listed. From there call a few places- it's always appropriate to say I'm looking to volunteer somewhere and I have a few questions for you. Wait to commit until you find a place that is a good fit for both you and the community partner.

A few questions to ask yourself during the process:

- Is the work that they do, and the way that they do it, in line with your values?
- Do the dates and times that you are available work for the organization?
- Are you interested in/willing to do what it is that they need a volunteer to do and do you have the skills to do it?
- What does the onboarding process for a volunteer look like? Do you need to complete an application, attend a training, or go to an orientation? Are you willing and/or do you have time to meet the requirements?

3. Meet a Need vs. "We want to give you..."

Make sure that what you're doing is what the organization needs and asks for, not what you assume they need or what you want to do/give.

4. Be Professional and Communicate

Be on time! On-going communication is important! Read the emails that the organization sends you. Be professional and contact the organization if you will be late or cannot make your previously-scheduled volunteer shift. Don't forget that even if EMU is on break, that doesn't mean that the organization is closed.



5. Proper Attire

Make sure you contact the organization to learn what clothing is and isn't appropriate to wear while volunteering there.

6. Representing EMU

Don't forget, when you volunteer at an organization, everything you do is a representation of Eastern Michigan University. You are expected to abide by the University Conduct Code. Your experience and interactions will quite likely impact how the organization views EMU volunteers in the future.

7. Respect the Community You're In

You are going into someone else's community. You need to be respectful of that community's needs, values, norms, space, materials, etc.

Some easy tips to work towards being respectful:

- Address and put aside your preconceived notions about any populations being served by the organization.
- Use people-first language. A person is a person first. For example "a person who is experiencing homelessness" vs. "a homeless person" or "a person with a disability" vs. "a disabled person."
- Do some research on the community and the organization that you'll be serving in. But remember, what you learn in your research does not fully represent the lived experience of the people in that community or organization.

8. Relationships

Develop and build relationships with the staff and constituents. Not only will it make your experience more enjoyable, but the people that you meet and work with can become a part of your network and may be able/willing to do things like write a letter of recommendation for you in the future. Ask questions, keep an open mind, and work to learn things from people different from yourself.

If you will need the organization to sign off on volunteer hours ask about the process at the beginning of your time with them. Also, it is very important to provide plenty of notice if asking someone to write a letter of recommendation. Little things matter, like taking the time, for example, to label resume files with your first and last name (vs. just "resume") really boost how professionally you are viewed.

9. We Highly Recommend Reflection

Reflection is taking the time after doing service/volunteer work to reflect on the work you participated in, how that connects with your previous feelings, assumptions, and knowledge, and how that work and social issue connect with a larger picture (society, laws/policies, a place's history, etc.). It's the part of your service/volunteer work that helps you make meaning of it.

A few reflection tips:

- Keep a journal with lessons learned, thoughts, and feelings.
- Use the **What? So What? Now What?** framework to reflect alone or with a group.
 - **What?** What did you do when you volunteered/served? What happened that stuck out?
 - **So What?** Why does what I/we did matter? What does it have to do with my life?
 - **Now What?** What are you going to do in the future that is tied to the social issue that we did work around today? What is going to change in your life because of the work you did?

10. Want More?

Contact the VISION Volunteer Center at vision@emich.edu or 734.487.1313, or visit us in room 346 in the Student Center, online at <http://www.emich.edu/vision/>, or on Facebook. We would love to talk with you more about service, working in the community, and how to get started. We are also always excited and willing to do trainings with your group to explore these topics more in depth.