

How Volunteering Helps Grow Skills Useful for Employment – *written by Jacqueline Felix** with contributions from *Sophie Flora-DeSart** and *Alex Dolle**

Did you know volunteering can be a foundation for workforce skills development and future employment? Volunteering can benefit not just your community, but you as well, offering many advantages that can play a remarkable role in learning new skills that set you apart in your field and help you discover a career path that can lead to your next job. Whether you are practicing your current skills or learning new ones, meaningful personal and professional growth is possible, and transferable skills gained from volunteer experience can be your advantage in today's job market. Volunteer experience elevates your professional value, demonstrating your initiative, character, and principles, as well as your capacity for growth, commitment to community, and dedication to meaningful service.

Volunteering also promotes learning and advancement of skill sets such as communication, adaptability, teamwork, time management, attention to detail, resource management, and leadership. Learning job-specific practices or specialized equipment operation can support continuous education, earn certifications, and assist with promoting career development, helping you get your foot in the door with a prospective employer.

Sophie Flora-DeSart was able to use her AmeriCorps volunteer experience to gain work at the Oregon Health Authority (OHA) first as an IMT (Incident Management Team) Coordinator and then as the (former) SERV-OR Volunteer Manager and Medical Reserve Corps (MRC) State Coordinator, a position she held for almost eight years. "I wouldn't have been brave enough to work at OHA without my two AmeriCorps experiences in National Civilian Community Corps (NCCC) FEMA Corps and the OHA VISTA (Volunteer In Service To America) program."

For Sophie, volunteering "opened the door to my career in service." Recalling her service in AmeriCorps, Sophie described it as "transformative and challenging." Specifically, with the FEMA Corps, Sophie stated, "I learned a lot about work ethic and perseverance doing manual and hard work. I'm particularly leveraging those skills today!"

Sophie utilized skill sets that transferred from the volunteer space to the professional arena such as leadership, planning and coordination, and building relationships. Volunteering allowed her to be introduced to a wide variety of people, situations, and challenges. "I feel comfortable taking risks for the potential of the reward of getting involved." Having been a volunteer and working with volunteers over the years, Sophie acknowledges, "There are so many ways to grow professionally as a volunteer. But then there are also endless outlets for personal development and recreation."

Looking to explore new career paths or curious about a specific role? Discover a field of work that you could see yourself in by volunteering. Volunteering grants you an opportunity to temporarily work in a field or role, side by side with others who currently work in that field to see if it is the right path for you. Use the opportunity to experience the work involved firsthand, ask questions about specific jobs or career paths, learn about what you like or don't like, and make connections.

[Alex Dolle](#), a SERV-OR volunteer for over four years and Medical Reserve Corps (MRC) volunteer, has been able to experience the benefits of volunteering. As an Advanced Emergency Medical Technician (AEMT) and recent Emory University graduate, Alex's current goal is to work in the emergency management field while planning for a future career in emergency medicine.

Volunteering with SERV-OR has enabled Alex to participate in two Pathfinder training exercises where state and county medical teams, first responders, military partners and volunteers gather to connect and share skills and knowledge concerning emergency management situations. As a member of the Bulletin Development Team, Alex has shared his knowledge and gained experience as a contributor to the *SERV-OR Bulletin*. In the future, he looks to use his skill set and gain further experience by deploying with SERV-OR when there is a need in the state.

For Alex, volunteering provides unique opportunities and allows you to “dip your toes” in practicing leadership. He has been able to learn about specific areas such as incident command systems, public health operations, awareness and preparedness training, while training with subject matter experts in their discipline, and establish transferable skills sets such as leadership development, problem solving, working with others, and learning best practices from professionals in their field.

Networking opportunities are also significant, strategic, and valuable features of volunteering. Direct interactions with individuals already working in a field or position of interest can accelerate your employment discovery. You can determine if their company is hiring and make a point to communicate your interest in following a certain career path. Your work ethic and professionalism in a volunteer setting can resonate with someone and lead to your next job or career.

Volunteering can also transport you to different physical locations or have you meet groups of individuals who you might not otherwise regularly encounter. Working in new environments or with new groups of people can be exciting, different, and sometimes even uncomfortable. Being able to work out of your comfort zone, having the ability to navigate challenging situations, and working with new teams, is how individuals can grow and gain a better understanding of real-world dynamics, self-awareness, and collaboration. Ever had a potential employer ask you, “Tell me about a time when you dealt with or navigated an unfamiliar situation?” This is the moment to use volunteering experiences to showcase your skills and how they can be applied in any work environment.

Did I mention the health benefits of volunteering? Volunteering has been shown to have direct links to better mental and physical health. Higher self-esteem, a greater sense of purpose, lowering blood pressure and stress, and continued physical activity that can increase longevity.

SERV-OR has volunteer opportunities, training courses, and classes available for anyone interested. Ready to get started? [Click here to find out more about SERV-OR.](#)

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