



Hints and Tips for Unexpected Situations

Here are a list of common issues that arise during volunteer projects and ways to overcome them.

Too few volunteers show up

Before the project, be sure to explain to volunteers the importance of their commitment. If, for whatever reason, not enough volunteers show up, discuss with the hosting organization's representative possible solutions. Some projects are more flexible than others. Adjust as best you can. Don't overwork the volunteers that did come.

Too many volunteers show up

Volunteers may bring along their friends and family, but despite their best intentions, sometimes an overflow of people can crowd a project site and lower efficiency and efficacy. Remind volunteers of this in any initial e-mails, and if extra people do arrive, talk to person representing the host organization about what could or should be done. Be aware that the project may be completed sooner than anticipated and plan accordingly. In some cases, the project can be expanded. Make sure new volunteers complete necessary paperwork and waivers so they may participate in the project, and the host organization has the final say in who can or cannot participate. Be sure to add additional volunteers' names to the attendance list.

Volunteers arrive late or leave early

Volunteers are expected to begin and end the project together. Explain to anyone requesting to arrive late or leave early that consistency and continuity are crucial to the overall success of the project. However, sudden circumstances do arise, and ultimately it is between you and the agency to decide what will work or not. Stress the importance of prior notification.



Volunteers are asked do something different from the planned project

Sometimes simple miscommunication can cause unexpected changes in the project. For instance, on the day of the project, you may no longer have access to a room that needed to be painted. In such cases, talk to the host representative and look for alternative jobs. Apologize to the volunteers, explain the situation and always give them the opportunity to leave gracefully—sometimes volunteers physically can't perform the new tasks.

If some or all of the changes are beyond the scope of the project, suggest that your organization would be happy to consider it as a separate request for the future. If the volunteers would like to get involved on their own, inform them that it is completely their choice but they should not feel any formal obligation.

Inclement Weather Impedes the Completion of an Outdoor Project

Seek indoor shelter if the weather is dangerous. Otherwise, consult the agency representative and volunteers. Be flexible and creative. Establishing a back-up plan in advance is often helpful. Also, be clear in project descriptions if projects are rain or shine.

A Volunteer Becomes Disruptive

Take the volunteer aside and discreetly discuss what you think might be interfering with the project. Listen to what he or she has to say and then try to agree on a solution.

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