Doing Good is Good for You
Volunteer!

Healthy Lifestyle Checklist

✓ Eat right
✓ Exercise
✓ Get check-ups
✓ Volunteer

As 10,000 Americans turn 65 every day, they are redefining what it means to reach this aging milestone. Some are delaying retirement. But whether they are working or not, many are embracing opportunities to contribute in new ways by volunteering, sharing a lifetime of knowledge and experience to improve the lives of people in their communities. But volunteering not only benefits society—research shows it can also pay big dividends in better health as you age.

If you volunteer for as little as two hours a week, or about 96 hours per year, you may experience improved mental, emotional and physical health—benefits that many older volunteers are reaping because, on average, they contribute almost twice as many hours as any other age group. Volunteering can help to reduce depression, lessen chronic pain and give your brain a boost. You may even live longer!

Do you need another reason to get on the volunteer bandwagon? With the number of volunteers age 65 and older expected to double in just a few years, chances are, you'll be in good company as you reconnect with old friends or make new ones.

Volunteer Profile

An 80-year-old man began volunteering after his wife was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease. Before he began volunteering he felt overwhelmed by the challenges of watching his wife's condition deteriorate and serving as her caregiver. He was depressed and sought psychiatric counseling.

"During my darkest times, I wondered why this was happening to me and whether I would be able to get through it. Now, as a seasoned volunteer with 15 years under my belt, I understand that I was being tested and prepared for the most important role of my life—helping others."

"Volunteering gave me a reason to get up in the morning and stimulated my brain as I learned about topics and issues that were completely unfamiliar to me. Currently, I provide older adults with tax assistance and Medicare education support and I can't wait to learn more so I can do even more."

Volunteering May Improve Brain Health

- 8.6 million Americans are expected to suffer from Alzheimer's disease— a fourfold increase—in the next 50 years.
- Research shows a positive link between volunteering and improved brain health.
- Volunteering "removed the cobwebs from my brain."—A study participant.

Doing Good is Good for You
Volunteering

Reduces

- depression
- chronic pain
- stress
- risk of disease
- social isolation

Increases

- physical fitness
- mental functionality
- sense of purpose
- social connection
- longevity

I Want to Volunteer! What Do I Do?

The process of finding the right volunteer opportunity begins with asking yourself a few key questions.

What issues or topics do you find especially interesting?
For example, have you always wanted to work with older adults or children? How about veterans or people with special needs? Do you have a special soft spot for pets or environmental causes?

What activities do you really enjoy?
Keep in mind that the activities you choose should not be limited to the things you do well. In other words, if you're a good writer, but often dread writing, explore activities that are more satisfying. And don't forget, volunteering provides an opportunity to learn or engage in new activities.

How much time can you realistically give to volunteering?
Volunteer programs often provide a range of scheduling options to accommodate the needs of participants, so before you accept a position, consider whether the duties will integrate well with the other priorities in your life.

To help you evaluate the range of issues and activities that you may find most interesting in a volunteer setting, please complete the enclosed **Self-Assessment Checklist.** Remember to be honest with yourself about what you're checking off. There are many volunteer opportunities available, so be selective and only choose the options that really work for you.

Even when controlling for other factors such as age, health and gender, research has found that when older people volunteer, they are more likely to live longer.

Corporation for National & Community Service-*The Health Benefits of Volunteering: A Review of Recent Research*, May 2012

Volunteer Profile

A prospective volunteer who completed a self-assessment of his interests and abilities was a lifelong musician. He checked "arts & culture" as a favorite issue and said he loved teaching others. Knowing there would be plenty of opportunities to teach music in the community, the local volunteer coordinator signed him up. But then she learned that his instrument of choice is the ukulele!

Over the course of two years, his ukulele lessons have become so popular, he's teaching in two senior centers to packed classes.

Finding Your Ideal Match

Now that you've completed the Self-Assessment Checklist and considered the amount of time you have to volunteer for an organization, it's time to do a little research to find the setting that's right for you.

Your search may begin in your own backyard, through referrals from family and friends who have had great experiences volunteering for local organizations. It's also easy to search for opportunities online, as many websites have databases of thousands of volunteer positions available in communities nationwide.

The **Corporation for National & Community Service** is a federal resource connecting millions of Americans to volunteer opportunities through programs such as AmeriCorps and Senior Corps. *www.nationalservice.gov*

Volunteer Match is a national online resource that helps volunteers connect with positions in the nonprofit world. *www.volunteermatch.org*

Got an Hour? Campaign is a program that was developed to help local agencies throughout the country attract volunteers to programs that work with seniors. The campaign provides downloadable materials, webinars and a search tool (powered by VolunteerMatch.org) to help connect prospective volunteers with opportunities and programs in their neighborhood. *www.giveitbacktoseniors.org/about-the-campaign.html*

Other Resources

Catchafire Skills Based Volunteer Match
www.catchafire.org

Corporation for National and Community Service
www.nationalservice.gov

Eldercare Locator
www.eldercare.gov

Encore.org
www.encore.org

Experience Corps
www.aarp.org/experience-corps

Idealist
www.idealist.org

LinkedIn for Volunteers
www.volunteer.linkedin.com

Peace Corps 50+
www.peacecorps.gov/volunteer/is-peace-corps-right-for-me/50plus

Red Cross
www.redcross.org/volunteer/become-a-volunteer#step1

United Way
www.unitedway.org/get-involved/volunteer

UN Volunteers
www.onlinevolunteering.org/en/opportunities

Volunteer.gov
www.volunteer.gov

Veterans Administration – VA Volunteer Service
www.volunteer.va.gov

advocacy | action | answers on aging

About the National Association of Area Agencies on Aging (n4a)

The **National Association of Area Agencies on Aging (n4a)** is a 501(c)(3) membership association representing America's national network of 622 Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs) and providing a voice in the nation's capital for the 256 Title VI Native American aging programs.

Our primary mission is to build the capacity of our members so they can help older adults and people with disabilities live with dignity and choices in their homes and communities for as long as possible. Learn more at *www.n4a.org*.

About Area Agencies on Aging

Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs) serve older adults and their caregivers in virtually every community in America. Our Network provides services and supports across the spectrum of need, including home and community-based services, transportation and healthy aging, and it is guided by a single vision— to build a society that values and supports people as they age.

To learn more about the AAA in your area, call the Eldercare Locator at 800.677.1116 or visit *www.eldercare.gov* to get connected today.

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Administration for Community Living

Step 1: Self-Assessment Checklist

Please select the issues you are passionate about and the activities you most enjoy, in order to determine which volunteer positions are right for you.

Issues of Interest	✓	Issues of Interest	✓	Activities of Interest	✓
Animals	☐	Immigrants	☐	Admin./Clerical*	☐
Arts & Culture	☐	Justice/Legal	☐	Advocacy/Leadership	☐
Children/Youth	☐	LGBT	☐	Building/Construction	☐
Education/Literacy	☐	Special Needs	☐	Caregiving**	☐
Emergency/Safety	☐	Politics	☐	Counseling***	☐
Employment	☐	Race/Ethnicity	☐	Driving	☐
Environment	☐	Seniors	☐	Event Planning	☐
Faith-Based	☐	Sports/Recreation	☐	Financial Services	☐
Health/Medicine	☐	Veterans	☐	Food Services	☐
Homeless/Housing	☐	Women	☐	Gardening	☐
Hunger	☐			Hotline Operator	☐
				Instructing	☐
				IT Support	☐
				Marketing****	☐
				Translating	☐
				Tutoring	☐

   * *Admin./Clerical: Answering phones, entering data, word processing, etc.*
  ** *Caregiving: Assisting with basic needs, housekeeping, transportation, etc.*
 *** *Counseling: Providing information and answering questions; conducting research and follow-up, etc.*
**** *Marketing: Promotion, public relations, social media, etc.*

Step 2: Sample Volunteer Opportunities

Now that you've completed the Self-Assessment Checklist, determining the issues that motivate you and the activities you enjoy, review the list below and identify the volunteer positions that might interest you.

Admin. Support	Front desk attendant Library aide Data entry assistant
Advocacy/Leadership	Advisory board member Civic association leader Fundraising coordinator
Building/Construction	Painter Handyman Home building and renovation project coordinator
Caregiving	Nursing home worker Special needs program assistant Hospice visitor Animal services assistant
Counseling/Mentoring	Domestic violence outreach volunteer Youth mentor Social services aide
Driving	Home-delivered meals driver Transportation provider for seniors

Arts/Event Planning	Special events assistant Performing arts usher Museum docent
Food Services	Food pantry worker Food server Cook
Financial Services	Accountant/Bookkeeper Tax preparation assistant
Gardening	Community garden attendant Greenhouse assistant
Instructing	Adult education instructor English as a Secondary Language (ESL) instructor Arts instructor (dance, music, crafts)
IT Support	Database administrator Webmaster Graphic designer
Marketing	Writer Guest blogger Public relations assistant
Translating	Book and material translator Translator/Proofreader
Tutoring	Reading and writing tutor Writing workshop coordinator

What to Do Before You Accept a Position

Carefully review the position description, have a clear understanding of work guidelines and policies and visit the location where you will be working. Take advantage of any orientation sessions offered to prospective volunteers.

Know Your Rights
You have a right to expect:

- A professional and safe work environment
- Adequate information and training to carry out your duties
- Trust and respect from all staff and co-workers
- Ongoing support and supervision
- Recognition for a job well done!

Know Your Benefits
You may be entitled to benefits such as:

- Vehicle insurance coverage
- Medical insurance coverage
- Tax advantages such as deducting out-of-pocket expenses
- Reimbursement for mileage