Giving 2.0™ Guide: Giving Yourself—
A Donation More Valuable Than Money
Summarized from Giving 2.0: Transform Your Giving and Our World

Jump in and engage—add value by giving your time, experience, skills and networks.

A philanthropist is “anyone who gives anything—time, money, experience, skills and networks—in any amount, to create a better world.” Chapter 1 of Giving 2.0 demonstrates how individuals can create significant social impact by sharing their nonfinancial assets more strategically to positively touch individual lives and transform organizations.

Volunteering can enrich your life in countless ways—building new business skills, enhancing your networks, expanding your knowledge and increasing your expertise—while simultaneously enriching the lives of those you want to help.

Key Takeaways

- Volunteering provides the volunteer with a wealth of opportunities and emotional rewards, from increasing overall health and happiness to unique learning opportunities, relationship-building opportunities and personal growth.
- Volunteering as a family helps build and share enduring values across generations.
- Investing your volunteer services has significant monetary value, something that we often underestimate. In 2018, 30 percent of the American population (more than 77 million people) volunteered.¹ These volunteering efforts totaled more than 6.9 billion hours and have an estimated value over $187 billion.²
- Before giving any resource in any amount, assess all the resources you have to give. Consider what level of commitment is viable for you. Decide whether you want to give your time, compassion and skills in person, online, on vacation, through work or your religious community, locally or globally.
- Reach out to target nonprofits and understand their needs, as well as how your unique expertise, experience and interests can help fill important organizational gaps.

Finding the right volunteering opportunities has never been easier. You can look to your local community foundation, your college or graduate school alumni service/consulting programs or ask your employer for company-vetted volunteering opportunities. Alternatively, use the matching services provided by VolunteerMatch, Corporation for National and Community Service/AmeriCorps, Idealist or Points of Light. You may also independently engage in a more involved program such as Encore, start a petition on Change.org or create a volunteering campaign on Points of Light Engage.

Joining a nonprofit or foundation board is a serious professional responsibility, as board members have fiduciary, legal and strategic oversight duties.

Many companies offer in-depth volunteering programs that build team camaraderie and community relationships while strengthening employee recruitment, workforce development and brand differentiation.

Making It Happen

What to ask yourself when considering volunteering:

- How much time do you want to give?
- How often do you want to volunteer—for example, a month every year, an evening a week or a couple of hours every weekend?
- Do you want to volunteer with someone as a bonding experience—perhaps your significant other, partner or spouse, your children or a friend?
- Are you looking to use volunteering as a means by which to meet new people for social or professional reasons?
- Do you want to give kindness and care, such as by reading stories to kids with terminal illnesses, or do you want to put your mind to work—for example, by helping a nonprofit develop a marketing plan, an awareness-building campaign or a website?
- Do you want to work directly with the people being helped by nonprofits or do you want to work with staff members at nonprofits?
- If you want to work with nonprofit staff, what are the most appropriate skills and knowledge you can offer them that they currently lack?

Once you've identified organizations you'd like to volunteer for, ask them the following questions:

- What does the organization need in the way of skills? Does the organization need volunteers in the field helping to deliver its services, or does it need writers, publicists, IT specialists or other types of volunteers to help with the organization's various operations (i.e., accounting, finance, marketing, web design, social media, fundraising, etc.)?
- How does the organization manage its volunteers?
- Could you talk to one or a few other volunteers to learn about their experiences working with the organization?
• What are examples of volunteer projects?
• Does the organization do any training or introductory programs for volunteers?
• What learning opportunities does the organization offer?
• Who will supervise your work or be your point of contact?
• Does the nonprofit have the capacity to manage your presence as a volunteer?

Once you have learned more about the organizations you are considering, ask yourself the following questions:

• What does the nonprofit you want to work with need? Is this need something you can offer and something you want to do?
• Will your volunteering create value for both you and the nonprofit? How specifically will you create that value?
• How will you measure the success of your volunteering? These measures may include a certain amount of money raised at an event, a child’s test scores improving over a semester or a more beautiful community space.

And remember:

• Your offer of time and skills may not necessarily be accepted by a nonprofit. The organization may already have enough volunteers or may not have the capacity to manage your presence (free help, including student interns, can be costly to nonprofits in terms of staff time and energy).
• There’s no shortage of nonprofits to volunteer at, so if your talents don't fit in the first place you offer them, don't stop looking.
• An organization to which you’re also donating money may feel obligated to accept your offer of voluntary help. It's your responsibility to make sure you're meeting an unmet need and that you'll be helping rather than hindering its work.
• For many nonprofits, offers of time, skills and talent are even more valuable than offers of money.
• Volunteer work can include the most unglamorous tasks. You may find yourself cleaning out a storage room, addressing envelopes or making photocopies. No matter how inspiring the cause, the work can be emotionally challenging, physically challenging or unstimulating. That said, changing people’s lives for the better makes it more worthwhile; improving the lives of others is exhilarating, regardless of the form your generosity takes.