



Volunteering

What It Is & What Is Permitted

Volunteering refers to typical unpaid activities with non-profit groups that are open to all citizens. These might include making phone calls for a political campaign, serving as an assistant coach in a sports league, helping at a food bank, serving on a board or in an advisory group, or working on a clothing drive for a faith-based organization.

As with anyone else who volunteers, it's important to think through the reasons that someone with a disability is giving his or her time and talents for free.

What are the benefits to the individual?

- Volunteering may be a step towards employment. It is a way of exploring interests, developing skills, gaining experience, building a resume, and making connections that lead to future paid jobs. At the same time, volunteering should not be a long-term substitute for paid employment.
- Volunteer activities should be based on an individual's interests and preferences.
- When individuals are not working or are underemployed, they may choose to volunteer in order to keep busy and active while looking for paid work.

Where can individuals volunteer?

Individuals may volunteer only at non-profit organizations. Volunteering is not permitted at for-profit, private-sector businesses. Per the Department of Labor (DOL), individuals may volunteer or donate their services for "public service, religious or humanitarian objectives" without expectation or receipt of payment. These additional factors can also help determine if an activity meets the DOL's definition of volunteering:

- The activity is generally part-time.
- The activities are typically associated with volunteer work rather than paid employment
- Services are offered freely and without pressure or coercion-
- Regular employees have not been displaced to accommodate the volunteer.
- The individual does not receive or expect to receive any benefit (beyond the experience itself) from the organization where he or she is volunteering. Volunteers may receive reimbursement for expenses, discounts on services, refreshments, small appreciation gifts, etc. They may also be paid a nominal fee, but it cannot be a substitute for paid compensation, or based on productivity. In general, organizations should be cautious in providing any sort of payments beyond expense reimbursement to volunteers.

Parent/Guardian Consent Requirements

An individual with a disability must be legally competent to freely volunteer his or her services. Per the DOL, individuals under 18, and those over 18 who are not their own legal guardian, cannot volunteer without the consent of their parent or legal guardian.

Vocational Rehabilitation and Blind Services (VRBS) Considerations

An individual can receive assistance through a Community Rehabilitation Program (CRP) to set up a Volunteer site. Short term support and training can also be provided.