

Including Volunteering in your CV/Resume

Why should I include my volunteering experience in my CV?

Your CV, also known as a resume, is a vital document when seeking employment. Your CV is usually your first chance to make an impression on your potential employer. Most people tend to focus on describing past employment on their CV, but many do not think about including their volunteering experience as well. Past or current volunteering roles can demonstrate many desirable characteristics or skills just as effectively as any paid job does. Listing relevant volunteering roles can not only demonstrate particular skills or experience, it can also establish that you have initiative or a genuine commitment to the community and to improving the world or the lives of others.

Increasingly, employers are seeing the value of volunteering. Surveys of employers are finding that many consider volunteer work equally as valuable as paid work experience.¹ It has even been found that relevant volunteer experience can give candidates an advantage in job interviews.²

Where should I talk about my volunteering experience in my CV?

How you include volunteering experience in your CV depends on how relevant it is to the job you are applying for.

If the volunteering role demonstrates specific skills, experience or personal attributes that are directly relevant to the job application, then it should be included with any other examples of relevant work experience, noting that it was a volunteering role.

If the volunteering role is not directly related to the job application, it can still be included to demonstrate initiative and commitment. It could be included in a separate section, such as a section entitled Volunteer Work or Community Involvement, that focuses on other skills or personal attributes that you wish to bring to the attention of your potential employer.

You may have received specific training during a volunteering role. This should be included where you list your history of study and/or training. If you received any awards or recognition as a volunteer, this should be included with other similar information.

What should I include about my volunteering experience in my CV?

Your volunteer role should be described in the same way as other paid work experience. Your description should include relevant information about what the role involved (including specific tasks and skills) and how long you were in the role. Be sure to make it clear that it was a volunteering role.

Should I include references or letters of recommendation?

If you leave a volunteering role, it might be good practice to seek a reference or letter of recommendation from your supervisor or Volunteer Manager. This can support your inclusion of that volunteering role in your CV. Similarly, your supervisor or volunteer manager may be approached to provide a reference or letter of recommendation in a current volunteering role, especially if it would support your job application.

Note that different organisations may have different policies and procedures around providing references or letters, including what they are willing to provide and what demonstrated commitment they might have required from you as a prerequisite for obtaining a reference. If you are participating in volunteering as a pathway to employment, be sure to have this conversation with your Volunteer Manager during the recruitment phase. This is important because it informs your Volunteer Manager that you will likely be seeking a reference and enables the Volunteer Manager to advise you of any requirements or restrictions.

Be aware that organisations may be less likely to provide a reference based on limited volunteering commitment or for one-off volunteering roles, though they may still be able to provide a statement of service or sign off a logbook or similar. Be sure to ask up front about this if you require it as part of your participation in the role.