



Volunteering and Leadership Development

By volunteering for leadership in professional organizations you not only reap those standard benefits but also expand your career and continue your professional growth. Don't overlook the possibility that you can gain tangible benefits from service—beyond the vagaries of visibility, contacts, or credentials. Benefits accrue in terms of your professional learning.

People volunteer for various reasons. In general, they do so to give and receive or to fulfill a need, or they may believe in a particular cause. Most significantly, they volunteer because they gain some personal and professional returns. People usually get involved in their professional organizations, chapter activities, and industry committees to:

- network with peer group
- increase visibility to market themselves or their company
- gain experience in using a specific skill or knowledge set
- demonstrate leadership abilities
- try out new materials and tools in front of an audience
- share knowledge and experience with colleagues
- help a professional group conduct business

Typically, volunteers select a specific position or activity based on available assignments, the time they can commit, and the requisite qualifications. They seldom think about how a volunteer experience may enhance their leadership development, although more thought should be given to what new challenges will occur and how that will develop their beliefs, learning, and leadership.



Benefit From Volunteering for Industry or Association Leadership

You can integrate volunteering into your plans for achieving professional goals. People generally think about the enjoyment and satisfaction they get from working with others towards a common goal and the sense of belonging that this kind of participation brings. By volunteering for leadership in professional organizations you not only reap those standard benefits but also expand your career and continue your professional growth.

Don't overlook the possibility that you can gain tangible benefits from the service—beyond the vagaries of visibility, contacts, or credentials. Benefits accrue in terms of your professional learning. Given the hectic work and personal lives that most of us live, it's a more effective and efficient use of time to gain more than one benefit from an activity, particularly one that you've elected to do. Why not view volunteerism as an experience based approach whereby working on a real project or an actual problem can lead to accomplishing some specific learning objectives of your own? Consider, as an example, serving on a membership committee to increase your influencing or adaptive skills. Establishing tangible learning objectives will further your commitment to volunteering.

Before exploring volunteer options or accepting when asked to serve, ask yourself some questions and relate to specific benefits that you want. Questions to ask yourself:

- How can accepting a leadership or committee position help my career and move me a step closer to my professional and leadership goal? What is my true goal for volunteering?
- What expectations do I have for this volunteer assignment?
- What expectations do people have of me?
- What benchmarks do I want to establish for success?
- How much enthusiasm, time, and energy can I realistically give to volunteering?

Volunteering can benefit both you and your employer. On an individual level, you will:

- develop and practice important business and leadership skills
- broaden your professional network
- gain visibility in your field
- gain access to new developments and cutting edge information in your field



Your organization will also enjoy benefits from your volunteer work, such as:

- the application of your new management and leadership abilities on the job
- access to what works in other organizations
- the opportunity to test new ideas with other professionals before implementation

A professional organization's environment is just as much a learning arena as is a workplace, thus you should view volunteering for a professional organization as a development experience. There's no reason you can't adapt some of your work-life principles and applications to a specific volunteer position—for example, adult learning, needs assessment, or performance evaluation. Perhaps you can volunteer to design a membership survey form. Refocus your purpose of moving outside a compulsory high-performance arena and learning in an environment that is chosen with due regard.