Volunteer Cost Saving Tips
July 3, 2008

Travel Cost Savings

While you can't count wages lost or personal time as a deduction, travel expenses are generally deductible, both to and from the volunteer location. The full cost of flights or bus or train rides can be taken off your taxes and if you drove to your destination and kept track of the mileage, you can give yourself 14 cents a mile in deductions. If you were planning ahead and kept track of actual expenditures on the trip (with receipts) you can deduct the entire cost of the trip.

Transportation costs for local volunteer work is similarly deductible. Did you drive around delivering canned foods for a registered (!) non-profit? Take that same 14 cents per mile.

In 2006, special legislation allowed volunteers working on relief efforts connected with Hurricane Katrina to deduct an even larger percentage of travel expenses. For philanthropic travel to the Gulf Coast, the IRS will spot you 32 cents a mile, although the deduction does not count for travel in 2007.

Personal expenses for volunteer work are generally not deductible. You cannot claim the money used to buy meals or purchase non-essential items on your taxes. But if you buy items for the non-profit you are working with and are not reimbursed, generally those expenses will take a little off the top of the federal government's bill.

Uniform costs, however, if the outfit is required, generally are tax deductible, as is the cost of keeping those clothes clean. The uniform must be required for the job.

Source: http://www.volunteerlogue.com/general-tips-and-advice/is-my-volunteer-trip-tax-deductible.html

Volunteers in the U.S. can receive tax deductions from the federal government on many costs associated with volunteering, such as travel expenses, parking, convention attendance fees, etc. The deductions apply ONLY if you are NOT getting reimbursed for these expenses by the organization you are assisting and you are itemizing on your tax form (not if you use the 1040 EZ form). If you have any questions about how you should file, please consult a tax professional.

Source: http://www.vaservice.org/go/volunteer/benefits/

The IRS will let you deduct any out-of-pocket expenses you acquire in the course of volunteering.

Source: http://www.cancerresearchfoundation.com/articles/130/1/Tax-Benefits-of-your-Donation

Technological Cost Saving

- **Allow e-mail exchanges in an existing volunteer program**. For instance, if you have a phone support network, matching clients with volunteers around a certain issue via phone, why not give these volunteers and clients the option of also conversing via e-mail? If you allow mentors and mentees to meet face-to-face one-on-one, off-site, what about allowing them to exchange e-mail addresses as well? This can save phone and paper mail costs for volunteers.
- **Communicate with volunteers who have Internet access via e-mail**. Send reminders about upcoming meetings, updates to your web site, an e-mail from a client who has nice things to say about volunteers, a survey about what it's like to volunteer at your agency... not only does this get your current, on-site volunteers used to using the Internet as part of their association with your organization, it also helps support the image of a caring, proactive volunteer manager!
- **Create an e-mail discussion list for your volunteers**. Why not let volunteers talk with one another? An online discussion group for your current volunteers can create a sense of team, provide a forum for ongoing feedback, and encourage collaboration among participants. It also gets your current volunteers used to using the Internet as part of their service.

Source: http://www.serviceleader.org/new/virtual/2003/04/000098.php

Virtual Volunteer Opportunities

* **Grant writing** - Many organizations survive because of grants but there are always so many to apply for. You can help by writing the grant proposal for your favorite organization. My friend Nana did this and got a $10,000 grant funded for Aid to Children of Imprisoned Mothers. Great work, Nana!

* **Website or graphic design** - This can be a great way to get experience in web design. Your favorite organization gets a great new site, and you get design experience and a page to point to showcase to new clients.

* **E-mail pen-pal** - Some organizations are looking for e-mail pen-pals for senior citizens or servicewomen and men. The Orphan Foundation of America needs virtual mentors for current and former foster youth ages 18-23.

* **Raise money on E-bay** - Use your existing E-bay account to sell goods and then have the money sent to your favorite organization. Perhaps you'll choose Modest Needs, since that's where I got the idea. Learn more here.

* **Transcription/translation** - Many organizations need translation or transcription services. If you're multilingual this may be a great way for you to serve.

* **Research** - Your favorite organization may need research done to write a grant proposal or press release. Maybe you can do that research. For example, BuyBlue.org is looking for "talented and dedicated people to prepare our initial database of corporations, and to make connections with like-minded groups."

* **Database development or management** - Since this is usually computer based, why not use your computer to do the work.

* **Copy editing** - Your favorite organization may need to have reports, grant proposals and other written material copy edited. If they email the draft to you, you can edit it and send it back. Service provided!

So now you can sit at home and still serve.

Source: http://sowhatcanido.blogspot.com/2005/02/be-virtual-volunteer.html