

5 Rewarding Ways to Volunteer— Without Leaving Home

By Tricia A. Mitchell

Volunteering is not simply a rewarding way to give back to society, it can be beneficial to your physical and mental well-being. Studies have found that volunteering can help counteract the effects of stress, boost your self-confidence and self-worth, and provide a sense of purpose.

However, due to location, work commitments, or health circumstances (not to mention current social distancing guidelines), many people are unable to commute to a brick-and-mortar location to volunteer. That's where virtual volunteering comes in.

Thanks to the power of the internet, today you can take on meaningful and engaging volunteering assignments in a time and place of your choosing. These can include roles for some of the most prestigious institutions in the world or encompass work of “galactic” significance. Below are five ways you can volunteer from anywhere.

Transcribe Documents

The Smithsonian—the world's largest museum—is home to countless cultural treasures like Abraham Lincoln's top hat and the Hope Diamond. But in addition to safeguarding artifacts at its 19 museums and multiple research centers, the organization works tirelessly to make its records more accessible to the public.

To digitize its vast collections of written materials, the Smithsonian enlists the help of 15,000 “volunpeers” worldwide. A computer, an internet connection, and attention to detail are all that is required to participate.

To begin, head to the Smithsonian Transcription Center [website](#), where you can sign up for a volunteer account. There, you'll be able to view available projects and filter them by theme.

The center provides volunteers with instructions and examples of how to properly transcribe a given document. Recently, volunteers have helped

transcribe the papers of astronaut Sally Ride, love letters by renowned artists, and butterfly specimen sheets.

Become a Citizen Scientist

You don't need a background in physics or chemistry to support the work of the scientific community. Numerous research organizations rely on the help of virtual volunteers to complete important projects.

One of the easiest ways to find these projects is to search [Zooniverse](#), a platform that showcases “people-powered” research initiatives. Currently, there are about 100 open projects on the site. Here's a peek at a few:

[Galaxy Zoo](#) offers the opportunity to classify galaxies by shape. Scientists believe you can tell a lot about a galaxy by its shape and classifying some of the one hundred billion galaxies in the observable universe could help advance our understanding of the cosmos.

[Penguin Watch](#) is seeking volunteers to count penguins so scientists can better understand their lives. If you have an eagle eye, you'll enjoy scouring images of penguin colonies in search of adults, chicks, and eggs.

Support the United Nations

The U.N. runs programs to address everything from climate change and human rights to gender equality.

U.N. programs, offices, and employees are scattered throughout the globe. However, there are a variety of ways in which you can volunteer virtually. Skills that are frequently sought include fluency in a second language, website development, research, and art and design.

To see what projects are currently seeking volunteers, check the [U.N. Volunteers page](#).

Share Your Voice

[LibriVox](#) is a nonprofit organization that creates free audiobook versions of

public domain works. Currently, more than 20,000 audiobooks are available through the service.

To create the audiobooks, LibriVox enlists the help of volunteer narrators from around the world. Volunteers choose a project they'd like to get involved in and then record themselves reading a chapter or an entire book.

Once narrations and “proof-listening” checks are complete, LibriVox posts the audiobooks in a [searchable catalog](#) on its website. There is also a LibriVox app, which is available on Apple and Android devices.

You don't need to be a radio announcer or voice actor to participate, and LibriVox won't make you submit a voice sample. But you will need a computer, recording software, and a microphone.

Offer a Helping Hand to Social Projects

[Catchafire](#) is a social enterprise that matches skilled volunteers with nonprofit organizations. Its website displays opportunities for a variety of groups, with each listing including project details, a description of the nonprofit, and an estimate of how much money the organization will save from your efforts. Usually, the latter figure amounts to several thousand dollars.

At time of writing, available projects included the following:

The [Therapeutic Ranch for Animals and Kids](#) is looking for someone with event-planning skills to offer analysis and coaching services.

The [Leave It in the Ground Initiative](#), a clean energy nonprofit, is looking for volunteers to provide copywriting services.

[Photo Start Foundation](#), a nonprofit that helps at-risk children develop photography skills, needs someone with video-editing experience to create a one to three-minute video.