

## **Volunteering by RV: Getting Started**

*by Hope Sykes*

Owning a recreational vehicle and choosing to volunteer can be an ideal situation:

- You can go where help is most needed.
- You can bring your family with you.
- You'll have familiar housing and cooking facilities.
- You'll have access to a mobile office should you require it.

Depending on the volunteer organization, you'll probably be able to work and camp on site saving on housing and local transportation costs.

- This sounds great, but I bet you didn't know that it is possible to arrange academic credit for some volunteer activities.
- Did you know that some organizations may offer you a small stipend or even health insurance?
- Some programs will even offer additional training, workshops, and handouts.
- A camp site may even be provided with hook-ups if you know where to look or inform the organization ahead of time that you will be RVing to the site.

Now that some organizations or agencies are experiencing staffing cutbacks, new opportunities will continue to open up for the volunteer who looks forward to travel, works well with others, wants to share what he/she learns, and is flexible. You can learn to build a cabin, scuba dive for artifacts, study surveying skills, write, photograph, act, sing, perform scientific experiments, and much more.

In fact blending the RVing lifestyle with volunteering can be just the opportunity to build stronger family bonds, help a community, and enrich your personal learning experiences all at the same time.

People (and families) of all ages can volunteer

Volunteering is not just for the high school or college student. In fact, goodwill is being spread by people of all ages and even families. Regardless of your age, here are five questions that each person should ask before starting out:

- Where would I like to go?
- What would I like to do?
- What skills do I have?
- Are there any new skills that I would like to learn?
- How much time do I want to commit to volunteering?

If you are a volunteering family, be sure to check the youngest age that the agency will accept for a volunteer position.

- Are the children allowed to work independently or are the parents required to accompany them?

- If you have very young children, what sort of arrangements are there should you need a sitter?
- If you plan to volunteer for an extended period of time, don't forget to ask teachers or others involved with your child's education, about the option of having the volunteer activities become part of your child's schoolwork. Some families have already done this and it's a great way to enrich your child's experiences.

## **Special needs**

If you have a special need like wheelchair access, don't be hesitant to ask. Many organizations work hard to make sure that opportunities are available to suit almost any necessity.

If you can't make the transition yet into full-time RVing, check with the company that you work for regarding their volunteering policies. Some employers are very supportive of charitable efforts. Communicate what you plan to do and see if your employer would allow extra time off or have some way of assisting your project.

You might also want to see if you can relate your volunteer efforts with some of your current skills from work. A company newsletter would be a good place to report your efforts and encourage others in your office to reach out.

If you are a teacher or are taking additional training, ask yourself what role would a traveling volunteer play in a thesis, dissertation, or sabbatical?

What questions should we ask?

To help you get started, I've created a list of questions that you should ask any prospective organization. A good organization will be eager to answer your questions supply detailed information, and have a steady supply of eager devotees.

## **Things you should ask:**

- What are the types of programs that they offer? If you are looking for something in particular and they don't have it, do they allow for the development of special projects?
- Can I arrange for academic credit? How do I go about doing this? Is there a fee for this?
- Do I have to pay anything in order to have the experience of being part of the volunteer team?
- Is any special training offered? Workshops? Handouts?
- Is there an opportunity to learn new skills like through a photography internship?
- Will I be provided with a uniform? Is cleaning of the uniform included? Will I require special shoes?
- Are there any other special fees that I will have to pay like entrance to a park, food, electricity, telephone service, etc.?

- Will I be given a stipend? How much and for what? What about health insurance? What is covered?
- Are pets allowed? What are the rules?
- Do I need to bring any tools or supplies?
- Is there a season for this work like mid-May to mid-September or is work available all year round?
- Is there a deadline for applications?
- What are the minimum and maximum time commitments for this position? A week? Two weeks? A month? Can I stay longer if I really like the job?
- Is my RV site included as part of the position? What hook-ups are available? Are they included?
- If more than one member of my family volunteers and a campsite is included as part of the benefits, can the work time be divided up so that each person's time will contribute collectively to the requirement?
- For example, you get a campsite with hook-ups for each 32 hours of volunteer work per week.
- Can my wife work 15 hours per week and I work the rest and still get the free campsite with hook-ups? Would we both be required to work 32 hours per week instead?
- What is the maximum length of rig that the campsite will accommodate? Can I park my truck or van nearby?
- What can I do during my time off? Is the time off really my own?

In closing, start early in your planning since opportunities are becoming more competitive and may require an application six months to a year in advance. With the right questions and planning, you can have an enriching experience at most any age.

For a look at the “working on the road” lifestyle, see Margo’s eBook, **Working on the Road: For Professionals and Just Fun-loving Folks** (<http://TheRVLifestyle.MovingOnWith-Margo.com#road>).