



Designing Hands on Projects

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Designing hands-on, done in a day projects for corporate teams!

Do you have a to-do list as long as your arm or a wish list of things you would like to do, if only you had the time? Maybe you have a garden to be cleared or indoor spaces that are a bit shabby. If so, a company team may be able to help! At Volunteer Ireland, we have company teams, large and small, contacting us every week, looking to volunteer. Most are looking to support a local charity, school or community group by helping with a hands-on, done in a day gardening or painting project and maybe one of these companies could help you!

Coming up with a project idea

Look at your property as if you are seeing it for the first time. What needs to be done, what could be done, is there a project you have been wanting to get done? Are walls, doors, skirting boards looking tired and worn, could a meeting room be spruced up with a simple painting project, is there an outdoor area in need of a clean-up, garden furniture that needs sanding and painting? Could the entrance area be brightened up with planting, colourful pots and a lick of paint, are there outdoor areas that could be brightened up with daffodils, have you wanted to create a fairy garden trail for the children you serve? There are so many possibilities that with a little thought and creativity you can develop a project that improves your facility and can quite easily be completed by a team of volunteers.

Is the project based on a real need?

Is this vital work, is the project based on a real and identified need, will it make a difference to your clients, staff, mission or organisation? Don't make something up for a company just because they ask, that is not of use to you and won't create a positive volunteer experience.

Is this a suitable volunteer project?

Ensure the work you ask employee volunteers to do is achievable, rewarding, has clear outputs and is something that needs to be done. Don't ask volunteers to do something you wouldn't want to do yourself e.g., painting toilets or cleaning windows. Cleaning windows is ok if it is the finishing touches of a larger project but it is not a suitable stand-alone project. Remember, your project should not leave volunteers isolated and working on their own. Being part of a team ensures volunteers feel connected and enjoy the day!

Can the project be completed by unskilled volunteers?

While company volunteers should come with a budget to pay for supplies e.g., paint, soft furnishings, plants, pots etc., they will not be able to take on professional trade jobs such as replacing the electrics, installing a new kitchen or laying a patio. While they might be very skilled in their own area of professional expertise, in this scenario you should consider them unskilled labour and develop projects accordingly.

Is specialised equipment needed for the project?

Is a digger needed to clear a garden area before volunteers can take part, do the upper areas of the community hall need to be painted by professionals with Working at Height and Ladder Safety Training certifications? Considering these items can help guide you on whether or not the project is suitable for volunteers.



Is my project big enough for a team of employee volunteers?

Unless it's a one-man job, there is a chance there is a team out there to support you. Volunteer groups come in all sizes – while one company might be looking for a project for 6 or 10 volunteers, another might have 15 or 20 people and another might have 100+. Many projects can be scaled up or down to meet your needs and the size of the team available e.g., if you have several rooms to be painted a company with 6 volunteers could paint one small room, a second company with 12 volunteers could paint two rooms while a team of 30 might paint several rooms. If working on a gardening project a team of 6–8 volunteers might sand and paint garden furniture, while a larger group might complete this task and also weed flower beds, trim hedges and plant hanging baskets with seasonal flowers.

How long is a company volunteer day?

Most companies want to participate in a hands-on project that will be completed within a single day. Most project days volunteers arrive about 9:15/30am. After a cup of tea, an introduction to the organisation, the project and its impact, volunteers are assigned to their tasks. They start around 10am and usually continue until 12:30pm/1pm, take a 40-minute break, return to the project, ending around 4/5pm.

Based on the start and end times above, the average volunteer spends 4–5 hours on their assigned tasks. This is helpful to know when estimating what tasks will be completed on the day. For example, if you have a team of 10 volunteers on a project day, they will contribute approximately 40–50 hours of volunteering for your organisation.



How do I estimate the number of volunteers needed?

First, make a list of all the tasks you would like to include in the project. Break each task into sub-tasks. Estimate how much time each sub-task will take and how many volunteers will be needed for each sub-task. Adding up the time and number of volunteers for all sub tasks will give the total number of volunteers and total time required to complete all tasks. Having this information will allow you to estimate how much work your volunteers will complete and will enable you to scale your project up or down if the volunteer numbers or time changes.

Remember, volunteers must be able to work safely, so leave room to spread out, space for tools and to work safely. Project set up and clean-up are a large part of the volunteer role so remember to build these into your timing and role description.

- **Indoor Painting:** To estimate how many people you need to paint a room, use our outstretched arms measurement method! Starting in one corner of the room, line up along a wall and stretch out both arms. Continue to do this all the way around the room. The number of times you have outstretched your arms is the approximate number of volunteers that can comfortably and safely paint in that room. Remember, don't include doors and windows in your outstretched arms measurements.
- **Gardening:** Again make a list of all the tasks you want to include in the project and break down into sub-tasks. On a garden project ensure volunteers are an arms-length away from one another in all directions, thus ensuring everyone has space to work safely.

Most groups get more done than you might think, so it's useful to have a longer list of projects in case tasks are completed quickly. In case tasks take longer, ensure you complete the core tasks first and assign less essential tasks at the end.



Who cleans up at the end of a company volunteer day?

Be clear in your volunteer opportunity description that clean-up is part of the volunteer role, reiterate this on the day. About an hour or so prior to the end of the project get a number of volunteers to start on clean-up. Ensure they understand that the charity does not have the manpower (you might be just one person) to clean up so it is imperative that everything is cleaned and put away.

What quality of work can we expect?

Remember, volunteers are not professional painters or gardeners and have a short time to complete the project so, you should anticipate some prep, clean-up and follow-on tasks after the project. For instance, in a painting project: you will need to remove furniture and all items from the walls (including blue tack) prior to the day; paint and paintbrushes are usually left with the organisation to reuse or dispose of at a recycling centre; masking tape and dustsheets are best removed the following day when the paint is fully dry. When gardening: plants may need to be watered in the following weeks; left over soil or bark mulch distributed around the garden; tools and equipment will need to be wiped down and stored away; and rubbish will need to be removed.

Will the company pay for supplies?

We encourage all companies to pay for the supplies that will keep their volunteers busy for the day. If you already have the project paint and only need the manpower then it is fine to move ahead without a company budget. However, generally community groups do not have the money to pay for supplies...it's one of the reasons you haven't done the project before now, right? So, definitely set the expectation that the company will need to provide a supplies budget and feel free to suggest a donation to cover the cost of your time.



Can I really tell volunteers what to do?

The simple answer is yes. When volunteers arrive on the day, they are looking for guidance and are expecting you to tell them what they need to do. Most will not have experience of how an employee volunteer day runs and will be waiting for you to assign them their tasks for the day. While they may be experts in their own field of work this will be new to them, they may not know where to start or may be reluctant to take charge in a new setting. So, don't assume they know what to do, it's your organisation, you are in charge of the project, have a plan, share it with them and encourage them throughout the day until the final result is achieved.

Should I prepare a Wish list?

Absolutely. Be prepared for when a company does contact you by creating a wish list ahead of time. This way, if you are contacted you will be ready to share your ideas and hopefully spark immediate interest. Always relate the tasks and project back to your mission and to your clients, explaining the impact of the project and the difference it will make to your clients and service? Think about it, when a company contacts you, that is your opportunity to sell your organisation and project. While there is a chance they will end up taking on another project, they'll remember what you do and how you support the community which makes the conversation in itself worthwhile.

How do I get a company interested in what we do?

Companies and employee volunteers want to hear about the communities you serve, personal stories about real people and how your services positively impact your clients. They know they can't change the lives of others in a single day, but they are interested in hearing how the project they are undertaking will make a difference e.g., create a welcoming atmosphere, provide a clean, calm space to relax, tame a garden so clients can sit and unwind. Remember, the client stories are what will grab them, inspire them, bring meaning to the day and put a pep in their step as they work on your project.

Do I have to say yes to a company?

No, of course not. You shouldn't feel under pressure to take on a team of volunteers if it doesn't work for you. There may be times when a company: wants to do a project next week and this doesn't suit you; has 50 volunteers but your project is only suitable for 10; doesn't have a supplies budget and you don't either. In these situations, you should feel free to decline their kind offer and invite them back at a time that is mutually agreeable to you both.



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