Volunteer Project Ideas During COVID-19
April 10, 2020

The need to strengthen the nation’s social safety net has never been greater, yet individuals who are eager to help must either stay home or keep their distance to avoid spreading COVID-19. There are many safe and valuable ways for companies and volunteers to make a difference, however, either in partnership with United Way Worldwide or through their community’s United Way.

However company employees and others choose to volunteer, we encourage everyone to follow the health and safety recommendations of the World Health Organization, Centers for Disease Control, and state and local authorities.

United Way Worldwide: Current and Upcoming Corporate Projects

Write a Note. Words of encouragement are critical during this stressful time. Volunteers will write uplifting notes to a variety of audiences, including isolated seniors, medical personnel, teachers, postal carriers and grocers. Notes are reviewed, printed and distributed by United Way Worldwide.

211 Promotion. 211 is a free, confidential information and referral helpline and website for people in need, helping them find food, pay housing bills, and obtain other essential services. United Way will provide materials for volunteers to promote 211 via their social media platforms to spread awareness of this service. United Way can also train volunteers to support a 211 call center.

Skills-Based Volunteering. Volunteers will identify specific skills they would be willing to share. United Way will connect the volunteer to an organization in need of this skill. Volunteers will work with the organization to discuss the challenge, brainstorm, and work to provide a solution, and could provide a wide range of services, from accounting to social media plans to translation services.

Video Volunteering.
- Read Aloud. Volunteers can help children develop literacy skills and a love of reading by participating in a virtual Read Aloud. Volunteers make their own videos to share with local United Ways, who will pass them on to elementary schools and partner youth agencies.
- STEM Demo. Volunteers can develop and record themselves demonstrating a fun, STEM-related activity for students to try at home. A background in science isn’t necessary for this virtual project.
- “Teach a Topic”. Many non-profit partners are seeking individuals who can teach interview techniques and resume writing, provide guidance around financial literacy, and other topics of interest. If volunteers have a strong background in a specific area, they can record a brief video highlighting important information that will benefit the community.
- Thank a Healthcare Worker. Now more than ever, healthcare workers are putting themselves in high risk situations to help us, our families, and our communities. Volunteers can create brief videos thanking these individuals which will be shared through our healthcare and public health partners.
- Thank a Volunteer. Volunteers around the country are assisting those in need on the front lines of the COVID-19 pandemic. Show your appreciation by recording a video thanking volunteers for their hard work, and United Way will distribute the videos to our network of volunteers.
Opportunities with United Ways

Help an Immigrant. Volunteers can work remotely with recent immigrants to improve their English speaking and reading and writing skills, review the 100 civics questions and more.

Help a School. Volunteers can help distribute food (or other items) at a local school to children and families in need.

Friendly Calls. Volunteers provide friendly calls to older adults and others who may be isolated. These calls are largely social “check-ins,” but volunteers will be asked to see if other issues emerge like food insecurity or transportation concerns. Volunteers are encouraged to call neighbors as well to see how they are doing.

Meal Delivery. Volunteers can support non-profit partners with their meal delivery service by dropping food off at the homes of older adults and others in need.

Non-Perishable Food Donations. Food pantries need non-perishables to restock their shelves. Volunteers can purchase a few extra items to donate through the local United Way or food pantry partners.

211 Call Center. Trained volunteers respond to 211 calls from people needing assistance with food and other resources.

Health and Hygiene Donations. Shelters and other organizations need health and hygiene items such as toothpaste, hand sanitizer, soap and shampoo. United Way can direct donations to the organizations that need them most.

Making Something that Matters. There are a variety of items that can be created at home and donated to local shelters or other organizations. At home projects include creating a no-sew blanket, t-shirt totes or happiness jars. United Way can provide details on a wide variety of projects.

Other Volunteer Project Ideas

Virtual Mentoring. This mentoring portal provides structured and unstructured mentoring programs for existing mentees. Volunteers can sign-up to support a student in need during this uncertain time.

American Corporate Partners Advisor. Volunteers can provide advice to veterans about their career path and goals.

Greeting Cards for Neighbors. Homemade greeting cards are the perfect way to brighten someone’s day and show someone how much you care. Get creative and decorate the card with your own personal greeting! You can use greetings to celebrate the seasons, any upcoming holidays, local events, or just to say hello.

Clean Up Your Community. Even in a time of social distancing, we can still help keep our neighborhoods clean. Whether it’s just you “plogging” along, or if you join with a few others at a safe distance, spend a few hours picking up trash (with washable or disposable gloves on) in a neglected area.
Financial Donations

Gift Cards. Local small businesses can be supported by purchasing their gift cards online. United Ways can help ensure individuals in need can utilize the gift cards once businesses reopen.

Response and Recovery Funds. United Ways across the country have set up COVID-19 community response and recovery funds to help communities during this pandemic. Consider donating to your city’s United Way fund or to United Way Worldwide’s fund here: [https://www.unitedway.org/recovery/covid19](https://www.unitedway.org/recovery/covid19).

For more information about these and other volunteer project ideas, contact mei.cobb@uww.unitedway.org.