

# Managing in Tough Times: Building Your Assets by Volunteering and Networking<sup>1</sup>

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When we face difficult economic times as an individual or as a family, it is easy to get caught up in stress and uncertainty. It can also be difficult to see the "light at the end of the tunnel" or to focus on opportunities for success throughout the process. When hours are cut back, there is job insecurity, or job loss altogether; then changes must be made. Throughout uncertain economic times, it is important to utilize resources. Two often overlooked resources include opportunities for networking and volunteerism. These resources can be a major catalyst in finding a job, as well as an alternative source of income, and even a strong networking support system. Through networking and volunteerism opportunities new people are met, job skills fostered, and you market yourself to your community and potential employers.

## Exploring Your Volunteering Resources

Keep in mind that networking and volunteering may be accomplished together at the same time. Through volunteering, you can build a network of friends, coworkers, and potential employers, all the while learning job skills and giving back to the community. It is important to consider your skills, your abilities, the goals that you would like to achieve through volunteering, as well as the potential volunteer sites in your community.

### Considering Your Skills and Abilities

"Think outside the box." Even if you have very little work history, you may have learned very important employment skills through previous volunteering or taking care of your family (i.e. time management, conflict resolution, organizational skills, money management, etc.). Use the following chart (Table 1) to help organize your skills and abilities.

**Table 1. Organize your skills and abilities**

<b>Educational background</b>	Example: I have a bachelor's degree.
<b>Additional certifications or designations</b>	Example: I am certified in CPR.
<b>Previous work and/or volunteer history</b>	Example: I worked in retail and volunteered in my nursery.
<b>Special skills through previous work/volunteer experiences</b>	Example: I can use various computer programs and I am good with customer relations.
<b>Hobbies</b>	Example: I like to sew. I like to play sports.
<b>Volunteer interests</b>	Example: Coaching little league. Volunteering in a local clinic.
<b>Other:</b>	
<b>Other:</b>	

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### ***Considering Your Goals***

It is important to think of short-, medium-, and long-term goals. Short-term goals are those that you want to happen within the next few days or weeks. Medium-term goals happen within the next few months to a year. Long-term goals happen within the next year and beyond. Writing down your goals is the important first step to achieving them. Think of personal goals, financial goals, business goals, family goals, etc. Goals should be **SMART**: **S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**daptable, **R**ealistic, and **T**imely. Use the following chart (Table 2) to help organize your goals.

**Table 2. Organize your goals**

<b>Short-term goals regarding networking and volunteerism</b>	Example: By Wednesday, I want to speak with three different potential volunteer organizations. By the first of next month, I want to begin volunteering at least 5 hours a week at one volunteer location.
<b>Other short-term goals you have</b>	Example: Starting next week, I want to have a family game night every Tuesday night.
<b>Medium-term goals you have regarding networking and volunteerism</b>	Example: In two months, I want to be volunteering at least 10 hours per week at one or more volunteer locations.
<b>Other medium-term goals you have</b>	Example: In six weeks, I want to have sent my resume to at least 5 potential employers. In the next three months, I want to have secured a job as a result of my networking and volunteerism
<b>Long-term goals you have regarding networking and volunteerism</b>	Example: In the next year I want to have started a savings account for a down payment on a car.
<b>Other long-term goals you have</b>	Example: By January of 2012, I want to have paid off the remaining \$10,000 of my mortgage.

### ***Considering Potential Volunteer Sites***

Regardless of where you live, it is likely that there is an abundance of potential organizations for which you can volunteer. Using the phone book, internet, friends, TV, and radio can lead to some good volunteer sites. Make a list of all the potential places where you could volunteer in your community. Potential ideas include:

- Schools
- Summer Camps
- Religious Organizations
- After-school Programs
- Sports Programs

- Nonprofit Organizations
- Community Agencies
- Tutoring
- Animal Shelters
- Hospitals
- Offices of professions in which you are interested
- Youth Organization (Boy Scouts/Girl Scouts, Big Brothers/Big Sisters, etc.)
- Humane Society

There are many options. Remember to think outside the box finding all potential places to volunteer. Next, rank them in order of interest to you. Use the following chart (Table 3) to help you organize your thoughts about your top five sights of interest.

**Table 3. Organize your prospects**

<b>Example Site</b>	<b>Details</b>
Name:	XYZ Animal Shelter
Phone Number:	(555)555-5555
Location:	Smalltown, FL
What do they do?	Take in abandoned pets and find them homes.
What skills do you have that they need?	I love working with animals. One of my hobbies is learning about dog breeds. I have a passion for helping animals.
How will volunteering here benefit you?	I will learn: how an animal shelter works; more about dogs, cats, and other pets; how to do the adoption paperwork; various office skills. I will feel good about helping animals. I will be able to work with customers.
<b>Site One</b>	
Name:	
Phone Number:	
Location:	
What do they do?	
What skills do you have that they need?	
How will volunteering here benefit you?	
<b>Site Two</b>	
Name:	
Phone Number:	
Location:	
What do they do?	
What skills do you have that they need?	
How will volunteering here benefit you?	
<b>Site Three</b>	
Name:	
Phone Number:	
Location:	
What do they do?	
What skills do you have that they need?	
How will volunteering here benefit you?	

## Exploring Your Networking Resources

There are many online resources that are also available for networking purposes. Through online networking, you can find old and new friends, search for potential employers, post your resume and credentials, and open up a new world of personal and career opportunities. There are many free services available to you. The following chart (Table 4) will give you a few examples:

**Table 4. Job boards and other services**

<b>Social Networking – These sites are used primarily to keep in contact with friends.</b>	
Facebook <a href="http://www.facebook.com">www.facebook.com</a>	Facebook is a widely used social networking site used to stay in touch with friends, as well as upload and share photos, links, and videos.
MySpace <a href="http://www.myspace.com">www.myspace.com</a>	MySpace is similar to Facebook, but allows a direct link to your page (ex. <a href="http://www.myspace.com/YourName">www.myspace.com/YourName</a> ) and more customizable backgrounds and page layouts. As with Facebook, MySpace allows you to upload and share photos, links, and videos.
<b>Professional Networking – These sites are used primarily to showcase your professional credentials.</b>	
LinkedIn <a href="http://www.linkedin.com">www.linkedin.com</a>	LinkedIn is a networking site for professionals in various fields. It allows you to create a profile that summarizes your professional expertise and accomplishments. You can then form a network by inviting colleagues and friends to connect to you. You can also use the "Jobs" tab at the top of your LinkedIn page to search for jobs in your network.
<b>Job Boards – These sites are used to find potential jobs and apply for them.</b>	
Google Job Search	The Google Job Search Engine allows you to search for jobs by specific categories and also gives you a list of other job boards to search.
Monster.com <a href="http://www.monster.com">www.monster.com</a>	This site connects job seekers with employers who are looking for employees. You can search jobs by job title, key word and location (Example: Nurse, Orlando, FL) and apply for them directly through the site after creating a free account.
GreenBiz.com <a href="http://www.jobs.greenbiz.com">www.jobs.greenbiz.com</a>	GreenBiz.com focuses on jobs related to green, clean technology, and sustainable business practices. Through this site, you are able to browse available "green" jobs and apply for them online.
ConstructionJobs.com <a href="http://www.constructionjobs.com">www.constructionjobs.com</a>	ConstructionJobs.com is a job board and resume database built exclusively for the construction, design and building industries. The site provides targeted searches by region, specific industry, job title, education, and experience.
Education America <a href="http://www.educationamerica.net">www.educationamerica.net</a>	This site is a network specifically for the field of education. Users are able to find information and employment opportunities in specific locations and areas of expertise. After creating an account, you are able to upload up to 3 resumes, upload cover letters, transcripts, certification information and other application documents, and apply online for jobs.
USAJOBS <a href="http://www.usajobs.gov">www.usajobs.gov</a>	USAJOBS is the official job site of the United States government. This site offers information on federal jobs and employment. You are able to search jobs by agency, location, and occupation and apply for them directly online.

These are just a sample of the online resources available to you! The list of job boards is almost endless, and by using a search engine such as Google, Yahoo, Bing, etc., you are bound to find a job board or networking site that meets your needs. As you find jobs that interest you, it is important to keep track of them. Use the following chart (Table 5) to help!

**Table 5. Track your job interests**

<b>Job 1</b>	
Company Name:	
Job Title:	
Salary/ Hourly Wage:	
Brief Job Description:	
Where did you find this job? *List Web site, ad, etc.	
How to apply:	
Contact Information:	
Date applied:	
Results of application:	
<b>Job 2</b>	
Company Name:	
Job Title:	
Salary/ Hourly Wage:	
Brief Job Description:	
Where did you find this job? *List Web site, ad, etc.	
How to apply:	
Contact Information:	
Date applied:	
Results of application:	
<b>Job 3</b>	
Company Name:	
Job Title:	
Salary/ Hourly Wage:	
Brief Job Description:	
Where did you find this job? *List Web site, ad, etc.	
How to apply:	
Contact Information:	
Date applied:	
Results of application:	

**Conclusion**

During tough times and job loss it is important to explore all available opportunities for networking. Be proactive and persistent as you proactively pursue a network through volunteer opportunities, other person-to-person efforts, or through the Internet—you will not only expand your job opportunities, but also you will gain confidence and momentum because you are approaching your situation proactively. After all, a good offense is the best defense.

For more information on how to manage in tough times, contact your local Extension Office or visit [http://solutionsforyourlife.com/families\\_and\\_consumers/money\\_matters/managing\\_in\\_tough\\_times.html](http://solutionsforyourlife.com/families_and_consumers/money_matters/managing_in_tough_times.html).