

The New York Open Center Volunteer Manual

(Revised 2/2011)



IMPORTANT TELEPHONE NUMBERS

New York Open Center

Front Desk

Volunteer Services (Angela Roberts, Manager)

Class Cancellation Hotline

Registration

Events Coordination Manager (Jazell Andujar)

Events Coordination (to reach Coordinators)

(212) 219-2527

ext. 100

ext. 117

ext. 171

ext. 110-114

ext. 122

ext. 134

WELCOME

Welcome to the Open Center, the nation's largest urban center for holistic learning and world culture. When we look for new volunteers, we seek people who genuinely share an interest in what we have to offer. So, before you get started as one of our volunteers, here is a little background information on the Center.

The New York Open Center, which is celebrating its twenty-fifth anniversary this year, presents more than 600 classes, workshops, conferences, training programs and cultural performances annually, attracting over 10,000 people. Its mission, since its doors opened in Soho in 1984, has been to present a diverse and imaginative range of approaches that kindle inner growth and spur social action. The Center was one of the first venues in the country to offer comprehensive holistic programs.

In the summer of 2009, the Open Center left its home of 25 years in Soho and moved to a more spacious location at 22 East 30th Street between Fifth and Madison Avenues. The Center houses a meditation room that is open to the public and a bookstore featuring a wide range of titles related to our programs and authored by our presenters. We have also opened a café serving organic food and refreshments.

The Open Center expresses the conviction that spirituality and clear thinking are deeply intertwined and that real cultural transformation will come about only when the inner and outer worlds are brought together.

Thank you for your interest in the New York Open Center. We are grateful to have you join us.

BEING A VOLUNTEER

To qualify as a volunteer, you must commit to working four (4) hours per week for a minimum of six (6) months. If you are interested in interning, you must work a minimum of eight (8) hours per week for at least six (6) months, or a total of 100 hours for academic credit. After you have accumulated twenty (20) hours in the Volunteer Program, you may request tuition-waived classes. When you take tuition-waived classes, you agree to serve as a class assistant (see *Responsibility Checklist for Classroom Assistants*, p8).

We have also created an online forum (using ning.com) as another opportunity to build community among Open Center volunteers. This is intended to be a fun, open, safe space to get to know each other and share experiences from our personal journeys and adventures. Once you have accumulated 20 hours we will invite you to participate. We welcome you to contribute your thoughts and stories, and to come up with fun ideas for “off-line” connections as well.

JOB PLACEMENT DESCRIPTIONS

Please keep in mind that our volunteers are integral parts of the Open Center workplace. Without them and our interns, we would be forced to close our doors. Therefore, we ask that you treat your volunteer position at the Open Center in the same way you would treat a paid position. **If you are unable to make such a commitment now, please wait until you are able to do so before signing on as a volunteer.** No hard feelings, we promise.

Staffing needs fluctuate – while there may not be an immediate opening in your department of choice, we will do our best to honor your preference.

Please read through these descriptions and confirm that you are comfortable with the work required before indicating your preference for a particular department. Also, please remember each department requires volunteer staff members who are punctual, reliable and dedicated to their work.

The following are descriptions of the various volunteer positions available at the New York Open Center.

REGISTRATION

This department is responsible for registering students for courses offered through our Open Center catalogue. Registration occurs by telephone, mail, the Internet and in person. This customer-service position requires attention to detail, an ability to work with numbers, comfort on the telephone and the personality to deal with a fast-paced, noisy environment. Filing, photocopying and other clerical duties are sometimes required.

Hours: Monday – Friday 9:30AM-1:30PM, 1:30PM-5:30PM, 5:30PM-9:30PM; Saturday – Sunday 9:30AM-1:30PM

R & R SERVICES

This is a customer service position in which volunteers act as liaisons between R & R practitioners and clients by calling both parties to schedule and confirm appointments. They also handle client payments and prepare daily deposits. Volunteers should be comfortable on the telephone, able to handle payments and gift certificates for R & R services. Knowledge of energy work is a plus.

Hours: Monday – Saturday 9:45AM – 2PM, and 1:45PM-6PM; Sunday 9:45AM – 2PM

EVENTS COORDINATION

In this position, volunteers work “behind the scenes” of the Open Center. EC volunteers assist the events coordinator on duty by setting up and breaking down classes. Volunteers' responsibilities range from arranging chairs and putting out art supplies to handling audio and video equipment for classes. Working in this department can be physically challenging; applicants should be able to lift 30 pounds. Volunteers should be self-confident, self-motivated, customer service-oriented and possess strong communication skills. During quiet times, EC volunteers may be asked to do some light clerical or maintenance work.

Hours: Daily 4PM – 8PM, 5PM – 9PM, 6:30PM – 10:30PM

FRONT DESK

This position requires volunteers who possess an excellent telephone manner and can multi-task. “People skills” are crucial. Because front-desk volunteers serve as receptionists for the Center, warm and outgoing personalities are needed. Volunteers should also have experience with the Open Center’s programs and must be flexible regarding weekly scheduling.

Hours: 4 per shift

VOLUNTEER SERVICES DEPARTMENT

This busy department makes sure that each qualified individual has been given an appropriate assignment within the organization. Volunteer Services volunteers may be involved with a multitude of jobs ranging from phone work and filing to brainstorming and creating new ways to motivate, encourage and explain the duties to prospective and existing volunteers. Volunteers must have an excellent phone manner, organizational skills and endless energy.

Hours: *Flexible*

DEVELOPMENT

The Development Office deals with all aspects of fundraising from grant research and proposals to event planning and donor cultivation. Volunteers should be creative thinkers and enjoy interacting with others. Internet/computer skills are required.

Hours: *Flexible*

ADMINISTRATION

There are many administrative positions available throughout the year. Depending on the volunteer's skills, interest and availability, positions include on-line research, filing, mailing and assisting with special projects. These assignments usually require a one-on-one meeting with the staff member in charge to make sure the two are compatible.

Hours: *Flexible, usually weekdays*

MARKETING

The Marketing Department requires volunteers who can help prepare mailings for class promotion, tally course feedback and assimilate conference survey results. Volunteers also assist with data entry, update mailing-list databases and distribute fliers/catalogues throughout the city. They also may be asked to do research. Volunteers who take this position should be comfortable on the telephone and willing to assist with photocopying. Computer skills are required.

Hours: *Flexible, usually weekdays*

LAPIS-ON-LINE

Our award-winning magazine has returned in an on-line format. Volunteers who have Web and/or transcription skills are needed to transfer audiotapes of lectures and conference presentations to written form and load them onto the Web site. Volunteers must be able to work independently. A keen interest in the subject matter helps.

Hours: *Flexible*

SPECIAL EVENTS

This position is an option for volunteers who may not be able to commit to four hours every week but still wish to lend a hand. From time to time, the Open Center hosts conferences, attends health fairs and participates in other outside events, and there is additional need on occasion for in-house help during special events. You will be notified of these opportunities as they come available.

Hours: *As needed*

VOLUNTEER TESTIMONIALS

Read about the experiences other volunteers have had giving their time at the Open Center...

“Volunteering at the Open Center has been beyond rewarding. It is an organization that really changes people’s lives and it has changed *my* life. I love everything the Open Center stands for and I love volunteering here.”

~ Sarah M.

“When I arrived in New York, I didn’t know anyone. Luckily, I found the Open Center and became a volunteer. The community couldn’t have been more welcoming and I have made some great new friends.”

~ Jeff B.

“Volunteering at the OC has been one of the best experiences I’ve had. I feel truly, truly happy and fulfilled to be part of this organization. The services provided by volunteers are always warmly appreciated and greatly rewarded.”

~ Kay C.

“I’ve found in the Open Center a community of people who promote awareness of other cultures and traditions as well as the chance to take many interesting classes for FREE! Working with the OC crew is a lot of fun and makes a nice break in my week.”

~ Margaret F.

“Working at the Open Center as a volunteer is brilliant! I get to be a part of the best holistic teaching center in Manhattan, meet all sorts of fabulous people, AND participate in all sorts of fun, interesting, and inspiring classes!”

~ Terri G.

“Since the day I set foot in the center I instantly felt at home with the wonderful people here, all of whom have something different to bring to the table. The opportunity to stretch my horizons by interacting with such a great group of people and by taking a wide breadth of classes has been amazing.”

~ Lesley B.

USEFUL INFORMATION

TRIAL PERIOD/TRAINING

Your first month as a volunteer is considered a trial period. This gives both you and your department supervisor the chance to determine whether a given assignment is a good fit. Some positions require training before you begin your regular schedule. Hours accumulated in training count as regular volunteer hours.

TRANSFERS

We ask that you stay in the department where you were originally placed for a minimum of one month. This allows you to become acclimated to the job, the department and the people. Ideally, you will enjoy your placement and remain with your designated department throughout your six-month commitment. However, we are aware that arrangements do not always work as planned. If you feel the need to transfer, contact Volunteer Services at ext. 117. All inter-departmental transfers must be handled through Volunteer Services. Please understand that your position may need to be filled before you can move to another department.

SIGN IN

Each time you arrive at the Open Center for volunteer service, please sign in at the FRONT DESK on the 1st floor. This allows us to keep track of individuals in a large system.

TIME SHEET

As a volunteer, you are responsible for recording the hours you work on your time sheet. Those hours are cumulative, and your total hours count toward seniority in class choices. *Please keep your time sheet current for reference in your file.* Your file can be found in the top drawer of the Volunteer Services filing cabinet, located on the third floor near the OC administrative offices.

ABSENCES

If you are unable to work your assigned shift, it is extremely important that you contact your department supervisor as soon as you know you will be absent. Leaving a message on the volunteer manager's voice-mail is not enough. Please make sure you speak with someone. In addition to calling, we all appreciate an email that copies both your supervisor and volunteers@opencenter.org. The sooner we know about your situation, the more success we will have finding a replacement. Also, we appreciate at least two weeks notice before you go on vacation.

Absences without notification lower your status on the class-priority list.

An extended **leave of absence** must be arranged with your department supervisor and the volunteer manager.

DISCOUNTS

After you have accumulated 20 volunteer hours, you are eligible for a 35 percent discount in the bookstore and a 10 percent discount in the café. You are also then eligible to request tuition-waived classes (see "Classes," p.6, and "Responsibility Guidelines," p.8).

KITCHEN

The Open Center break room is labeled: Employees Only. Rest assured that the kitchen is available for the center's volunteers as well.

CLASSES

After you have accumulated 20 volunteer hours, you may request tuition-waived classes. There is no limit to how many classes may be requested, and the Open Center will do its best to accommodate your wishes.

When taking a class through the Volunteer Program, you have the additional roles of teacher's assistant and representative of the Open Center. All staff, interns and volunteers who take advantage of tuition-waived classes are expected to fulfill class-assistant obligations. As such, when you are granted a request, you are required to arrive one hour early if class is being held off-site and ½ hour early if class is at the Open Center. Also, you must stay after class for ½ hour to help with the changeover. Welcoming faculty and class participants, extending hospitality and helping to ensure the smooth running of the class also are your responsibilities. A separate sheet, ***Responsibility Checklist for Classroom Assistants***, explains these obligations (this can also be found on the last page of this manual).

Time spent volunteering in class does not count toward your volunteer service hours.

The course request deadline is the 10th of each month for the following month's courses, events and lectures. For example, if you want to take a course that begins on Dec. 29, your request for that class is due Nov. 10. Requests must be put in the volunteer manager's mailbox, which is located on the third floor (staff mailboxes are near the volunteer filing cabinet). **It is important that you list your course requests in order of priority, as that is a significant factor in course assignments.**

If your monthly volunteer hours are fewer than 16, you are not eligible for the next month's classes unless you make up the missing hours by the course request deadline.

Class assignments are distributed after the 17th of each month (one week after class requests are due). Courses are assigned by a system ranking individuals in order of seniority and request priority. If you request a popular class as your first choice and have not been at the Open Center long, you may not get it. However, if your first priority request were a senior volunteer's fourth priority, your request would be honored before his/her request. We do our best to ensure entry into courses.

If volunteer slots are not filled after the 17th of the month, available slots are posted on the volunteer board located on the third floor. They are filled on a first-come, first-served basis. Back-up volunteers are listed in the Class Request file located in the Volunteer Services office. Please remember that back-up volunteers are not needed unless there is a cancellation. If you are a back-up volunteer, you will be called in the event of cancellation and offered the volunteer position.

Remember, in order to receive classes, you must:

- 1. Maintain a weekly average of four volunteer hours.***
- 2. Turn in your requests by the 10th of each month for courses beginning in the following month.***
- 3. Have the prevailing seniority or priority for each particular request.***

Volunteer class request sheets are available in the volunteer filing cabinet on the third floor. ***Please make sure you fill out the request forms completely, particularly the "Total Hours" space.***

Approximately one to two weeks after submitting your requests, the volunteer manager will return your class request form to your folder, letting you know which, if any, class requests have been honored. **Please request more than one class, because we may not be able to offer your first choice.** Keep in mind that hours, seniority and feedback from staff supervisors all are taken into consideration when selecting courses for volunteers.

IF YOU ARE ASSIGNED TO A COURSE AND CANNOT ATTEND, it is your responsibility to call Volunteer Services at the Open Center, 212-219-2527, ext. 117. If you are canceling with less than one week's notice, please call the class cancellation hotline at ext. 171.

PENALTIES

Because the New York Open Center is so reliant on its volunteers, we need to ensure that they carry out all of the obligations assigned to them. It also is extremely important that we keep our class request system fair to those who are diligent about fulfilling their assigned duties. Consequently, there are penalties when obligations are not met.

There are two situations in which volunteers are penalized: absence without notification for your assigned shift, and failure to meet your classroom assistant obligations. If you miss your shift three times without notifying your supervisor in advance, or if you fail to meet your classroom assistant obligations three times, you will not be able to request tuition-waived classes for one month.

If you fail to work consistently and/or consecutively week to week, we will, regrettably, have to release you from volunteer service here at the Open Center.

Thank you for taking the time to read this manual. If you have any questions, please feel free to call the Volunteer Services office.

RESPONSIBILITY CHECKLIST FOR CLASSROOM ASSISTANTS

Your Help With Class Set-Ups & Breakdowns is Essential!

YOU MUST ARRIVE 1/2 HOUR BEFORE YOUR COURSE IS SCHEDULED TO BEGIN.

You are given a grace period of ten minutes in case you are running late.

1. **Report to Registration** (ground floor): Let them know what class you are here for and sign in on the class assistant clipboard. Registration will tell you how class attendance will be handled – by taking tickets in your classroom or checking off names on a class roster. **If the class or event that you are attending takes place outside the Open Center, call registration in advance for any special instructions.**

2. **Report to Events Coordination** (second floor): Find the events coordinator on duty to help him/her with class setup. S/he will be in the office on the 2nd floor or in one of the classrooms. Tell the coordinator what class you are here for so you can be given proper instructions for that class.
Be sure to ask what to do when class ends so that you can start changing over the class. Please don't change class set-ups without asking; you may inadvertently create more work for everyone! Please wear a name badge to identify yourself clearly as a Classroom Assistant.

* **Help prepare the room:** Each classroom should have a supply of cups and tissues. Water pitchers should be filled for the instructor and students.
* **Please be familiar with the location of the switches for *lights, fans* and the *thermostat*** before class so that adjustments can be made quickly and easily. The events coordinator on duty will be able to tell you where they are located.
* **Feedback sheets:** On the last (or only) day of class, please coordinate with the instructor when to hand out the *Feedback Sheets* (copies are available in top drawer of the volunteer filing cabinet on the third floor). Allow the instructor to review them after class is dismissed, and return them to the events coordinator on duty. We encourage you to fill out a feedback sheet, as well.

3. **Introduce yourself to the Instructor:** Most of the teachers and presenters are not from the city. You can help us make them feel at home at the Open Center by letting them know that, as a class assistant, you are here to support them.

4. **Be ready** to ask the first question. Sometimes a group needs help getting started.

5. **Valuables:** Please remind the instructor and students not to leave any valuables in the room during breaks or lunch.

6. **Latecomers:** When latecomers arrive, make sure they have tickets or are on the class roster. Please sit near the door so you can greet latecomers easily with the least disruption to the class.

7. **If a problem arises** during the class that you cannot handle, please leave the class and report the problem to the events coordinator on duty. (Have the Front Desk page the coordinator if you cannot find him/her.) The events coordinator will handle the situation.

8. **At the end of every Class: You are expected to stay 15 – 30 minutes after class to help Events Coordination break down the classroom and prepare it for the next event.**

IF YOU CANNOT MAKE A CLASS AND YOU ARE CALLING TO LET US KNOW WITH ONE WEEK'S NOTICE, CALL THE VOLUNTEER MANAGER AT X117.

**IF YOU MUST CANCEL WITH LESS THAN ONE WEEK'S NOTICE,
PLEASE CALL THE CLASS CANCELLATION HOTLINE AT X171.**