Professionalism in Volunteering

- **Dress & Appearance:** Be mindful of how your clients will receive you. Avoid offensive language or graphics and always lean towards a conservative choice of clothing. Make sure you are able to safely and comfortably operate in your attire. For example, if you are volunteering with children where you might be running around or playing on the floor, make sure your shoes and clothes will stay in place to avoid any embarrassing mishaps.

- **Communication:** Be an active and engaged participant in your volunteer projects. Make sure you are hospitable to your community agency host. Keep them informed of any program or schedule changes and ask for constant feedback. They should never be unclear of what you are doing with the project or when you will be at the agency. Make sure you are clear on organization protocol if you will be answering the telephone or greeting clients in a reception area.

- **Flexibility:** Expect the unexpected. You may have modified job duties depending on the needs of the clients and schedules may shift last-minute due to unforeseen circumstances. Efforts to firmly stick to a predetermined plan will likely be in vain. Successful volunteers are engaged and attentive, and can coolly adapt to changing circumstances and demands. Being a good volunteer is about doing what is necessary.

- **Patience:** Meaningful community development is a long and slow process. To maximize effectiveness and maintain a positive attitude, volunteers should focus on the process rather than the successes, avoid forcing an agenda, and let things develop at their own pace.

- **Openness:** Immersing yourself in a new environment is a rare and awesome opportunity - take advantage of it by welcoming new perspectives on the world. You may be going into an environment where things may be different than what you are used to, so be careful not to jump to conclusions. Respect, tolerance, and an open mind are essential to averting unprofessional behavior precipitated by culture shock and ethnocentrism.

- **Dependability:** The privilege of volunteering comes with great responsibility. It is your job to follow through on your commitment to your host agency and target community. Be respectful of the time and energy that the agency has dedicated in order to prepare for your volunteer project.

- **Humility:** Volunteering in a new environment will give you the unique opportunity to discover just how little you know. You may often find yourself asking for assistance to complete basic tasks because the clients are new to you. Put the clients first.

- **Enthusiasm:** How will you be remembered when you leave? Your presence, attitude, and actions will leave a lasting impression on the communities you work with. Although it may be impossible to save the world through a short-term volunteer program, your presence itself is highly impactful.