

## Snow Removal Resources for Community Organizations

In the City of New York, homeowners are required by law to clear the sidewalk in front of their property in the event of a snowstorm. Keeping our sidewalks clear is important for public safety, and not doing so could result in a fine from the NYC Department of Sanitation. Some of our neighbors are unable to comply due to factors outside of their control such as age or disability. If your group or organization is considering launching a volunteer snow removal program to help out, we want to share some resources and best practices to help make your program successful.

- 1. Find Your Target Residents:** In the case of a snowstorm, you want to work quickly to serve those in need. If you are unsure of who needs help in your community try reaching out to [local elected officials](#) and/or your local [community board](#). They often receive calls from people in the community who need assistance in a snowstorm. Local religious institutions and senior centers are also a good point of contact.
- 2. Recruit Volunteers:** It is critical to develop a recruitment plan that is targeted to ideal volunteer populations - in this case that would be people who can perform manual labor in the cold. Use a range of recruitment tools, including your website; social media; direct outreach like email, and phone calls; and indirect outreach like news articles, word of mouth, and flyering. Local gyms and schools are a great starting point for recruitment. Consider posting your volunteer opportunity on websites such as [NYC Service](#), [Idealist](#), and [New York Cares](#), and reaching out to additional partners who may be able to amplify your message!
- 3. Collect Materials:** Snow removal requires tools such as shovels, snowplows, snow blowers, and rock salt. If you are organizing a snow removal program prior to a snowstorm then you may have time to possibly fundraise and amass tools. You will need a centralized place to store tools. Otherwise, if you are organizing in the wake of the snowstorm then it may make more sense to ask your volunteers (and/or the individuals requesting assistance) if they have tools that can be used. This is usually done most effectively by asking individuals requesting services if they have tools available at their homes for volunteers to use. If they don't it is a good practice to ask volunteers what tools they have available at the point of sign-up.

4. **Establish a waiver.** In some instances, it may make sense to have your volunteers sign a waiver form before serving. A sample volunteer waiver is included on page 20 of the [Great Volunteer Management System](#).
5. **Train Volunteers:** Snow removal on icy sidewalks can pose a hazard, so it is important to establish safety procedures. Below are some tips and recommendations for your group to consider.
  - *Dress appropriately.* Wear layers that you can easily shed as you warm up; and shoes with traction to avoid slipping.
  - *Create a buddy system.* Avoid having volunteers shovel alone. That way volunteers can have someone to support them and share the workload.
  - *Set a time limit.* Encourage your volunteers to take breaks often to avoid overexertion, and keep shifts to no more than 2-3 hours. Moving slow and steady is better in the long run.
  - *Stay hydrated.* Your volunteers should have access to water and be drinking as often as one would during a vigorous exercise. Coffee may sound like a good way to thank your volunteers, but the caffeine puts more strain on our hearts. Maybe opt for hot chocolate or more water instead!
  - *Warm up.* Stretching before the start of snow removal can help reduce the chances of injury. Leading a group warm up is also a great way to motivate your volunteers and get them excited for the tasks ahead. Go over the proper way to shovel. You should push, not lift the snow whenever possible. When lifting snow is necessary, make sure to lift with your knees.
6. **Track Community Impact:** As your program gets underway, it will be important to keep track of your volunteers and the homes you have cleared so you have a reference point for the next snowstorm. Develop a physical map of the community, listing where you acquired tools or help from neighbors. After each shift, it may make sense to check in on the residents you are helping. What other needs are not being met because of the snowstorm, and how might your organization be able to play a part? To learn more about tracking volunteer impact, check out [Topic 8 in the Great Volunteer Management System](#).

Thank you for thinking of others during a snowstorm. The City of New York greatly appreciates the work of all our volunteers!