

Make a Difference Week Event Host FAQ

This document provides information about how you can plan and host a local volunteer restoration event as a part of SER's *Make a Difference Week*. If you have questions after reviewing the information presented here, please contact info@ser.org.

When is *Make a Difference Week*?

The next *Make a Difference Week* will run from Saturday, June 3 through Sunday, June 11, 2023.

What kind of event can I organize?

Make a Difference Week events do not need to be any different from a typical volunteer restoration event, and can take place on any day during the week of June 3-11, 2023. Some ideas for events include: restoration plantings, seed collection and seedball making, invasive plant pulls, citizen science monitoring of restoration sites, or any other restorative activity that positively impacts the ecology of your region. Please consider any local COVID-19 restrictions in your area when thinking about what kind of event you'd like to host.

Volunteer restoration events are great opportunities for community members to reconnect with their local ecosystems, become invested in and supportive of restoration activities, and make a significant positive impact on their environment. As you start to plan your event, be sure to keep these questions in mind:

Where will the event take place? The choice of your event location determines what activities will be feasible and who will be likely to participate. If you are interested in planning an event but aren't sure what to do, consider reaching out to local government agencies or environmental groups for

suggestions on potential activities. These organizations might also be interested in co-hosting an event with you.

What will the activity be? What type of restorative activity do you have the capacity and funding to organize? Some volunteer events require no funding (e.g., weed pulls), whereas some might require materials that must be donated or purchased (e.g., seedlings). Make sure you can clearly articulate what volunteers will be doing, where they will be doing it, what supplies and materials that either they will need to bring or you will need to provide, and what the volunteers can realistically accomplish during your event.

Who will participate? Next, you should consider how many and what type of volunteers you will need to accomplish your planned activities. Volunteer events can accommodate a wide range of people. Small events might have 3-5 volunteers, while larger events might host hundreds of people.

You should also consider if your volunteers will need any training to participate, if the event will be accessible to people of all ages and physical abilities, and/or if you will require volunteers with specific skillsets. While SER's *Make a Difference Week* website provides a platform for people from across the world find your event, it will also be important for you to do local outreach to attract volunteers.

When will the event start and end? You can host a volunteer event on any day of *Make a Difference Week* (June 3-11). It is important to consider local holidays when scheduling an event. It is also relevant to consider what time of day might be best for your activity and your participants. We expect that most events will take place on the weekends, but you can also host an evening event during the week if that is most likely to work best for your volunteers. It is entirely up to you.

Why volunteer? Finally, make sure you can explain to your volunteers why their participation matters. A good introduction to the history of the site, local ecology, and the expected outcome of their actions will go a long way towards giving volunteers a sense of engagement with the project and your local ecosystem. By participating in *Make a Difference Week*, people will be part of a collective restoration event with a global impact.

You should also think about how you'll measure your achievements and acknowledge your volunteers' labour. If you're removing an invasive species, you could measure by number of garbage bags filled or the weight of organisms removed. If you're planting or seeding, you could measure the area treated, the number of seedlings planted, or the weight of seed spread. Do you want to have a small celebration with music and snacks at the end of the event? Take pictures or videos to share with volunteers, on social media, or on your organization's website or newsletter. We will be asking all hosts to share this reporting information (in addition to photos and videos of the event) with SER so that we can report on the collective global impact of *Make a Difference Week*!

Event Safety Considerations

COVID-19 Protocols: Familiarize yourself with your local COVID-19 guidelines and consider how they'll influence your event – will you need to limit the size of the event? Will volunteers be able to share tools? Plan an introduction at the start of the event that informs your participants of the guidelines they'll need to follow, and be ready with both masks and hand sanitizer. It's a good idea to collect volunteer contact information at the start of the event in case you need to facilitate contact tracing. We want all of our event organizers and volunteers to have a safe, positive experience during *Make a Difference Week* and that means carefully following all local COVID-19 guidelines.

Safety: Before the event, be sure to do a thorough walkthrough of your site. Note any potential hazards (such as rough terrain, steep slopes, traffic, wildlife, exposure to weather, etc.). Inform your volunteers of any hazards before the event, and tell them what clothing or supplies they'll need for day. Consider bringing water, sunscreen, and a first aid kit to your event. If your site is remote, please be sure to make an emergency evacuation plan in advance. Make a backup plan for your event in case weather prevents you from safely working on your site.

Event Logistics

Planning out the logistics of your volunteer event in advance can help prevent unexpected problems. Some things to consider include:

Promotion: Make sure volunteers know about your event! In addition to adding your event to SER's *Make a Difference Week* website, you should plan to advertise your event through social media, websites, newsletters, flyers in community centers, direct outreach to groups who might be interested, or press releases sent to your local media stations. When you submit your event to the *Make a Difference Week* website, it will be displayed on an interactive map that helps local volunteers find and register for it.



Registration: How will local volunteers register for your event? Will you set up a web-based registration system, do people need to email you, or will you be promoting the event without registration? This may be especially of concern in regions where there are COVID-related limits to the size of gatherings.

Structure for the day: While your volunteer event doesn't need to follow a strict schedule, make sure you plan for the overall structure of the day and when activities will happen. Be prepared for volunteers to show up both early or late. Make a plan for how you will introduce volunteers to the restoration opportunities on the site and to the event. If you need to train your volunteers, have the training and trainers fully prepared for this portion of the project. Create a schedule, especially in particularly hot or cold climates to make sure you have planned breaks for people to drink water and cool off, or have an opportunity to warm up. Be prepared for both more and fewer people than expected (some people who sign up won't attend, some people may attend who didn't sign up).

Cost: While it is possible to host a volunteer restoration event at no cost, it's important to consider the potential cost of materials, tools, permits, and water/snacks for volunteers. There are many options available for local event sponsorship. Local businesses or municipalities may be interested in contributing to your event – often by supplying refreshments or lending tools to your team.

Materials: At the earliest planning stage of your event, you should consider what types of materials you might need and how you will provide them. Assign someone to be responsible for gathering any materials and bringing them to your volunteer site on time for the day of the event. Remember to plan for their return if they are loaned. If your project involves the removal of material (e.g. garbage or invasive species), make a plan for where this material will go, for having collection bags for the materials, and for safe and legal disposal after the event.

Accessibility: How will your volunteers get to your site? Are there limitations on the number of vehicles that can park at the site, or the type of vehicle needed to access it?

If volunteers need transportation, be sure to plan for this ahead of time. Make sure all of your volunteers know when and where to meet. Be clear with your volunteers about the site conditions to prepare them for any challenges they may face in moving around your site.

Refreshments: If you're providing water and snacks, plan for where they will come from and how you will dispose of any waste. Assign someone to be responsible for the refreshments. If you don't have a budget for water and snacks, remind your volunteers to bring their own, but still plan to have extra water on hand in case anyone forgets.



Event Reporting

To share the impact of *Make a Difference Week*, we're going to need some data! During your event, please take lots of photos and videos (with the consent of your volunteers). Remember to record how many volunteers you had and your measures of success. We will be collecting and combining all of this data into a final report, so measurements that are easy to compare between projects are especially helpful. Ideas for common measurements include: area treated, number of seedlings planted, or weight of invasive species removed. After *Make a Difference Week* concludes, we will provide you with a simple form to help you collect/report this basic data. You may choose to collect additional information as well. Please make sure to record the number of volunteers that attend your event.

If you have any questions, please contact us at info@ser.org.