



## How to Volunteer in Tohoku 東北で奉仕活動をするには May. 06, 2012

David Slater

While the rhetoric in this post 3.11 era is "mae muki" (looking ahead), there are still hundreds of thousands of displaced people displaced by the Tohoku disasters, many of whom are living in "temporary housing" units. This is not a self-sufficient way of life, and volunteers are still needed in many different ways, from playing with school kids and having tea parties with the elderly, to recovery activities, such as helping build a shotengai (shopping arcade) or fixing fisherman's nets. There is still rubble to be cleared, and beaches and parks to be cleaned. Of course, the more interaction with locals, the more Japanese language ability is useful.

Most "volunteer centers" and NPOs have closed or are no longer able to accommodate random volunteers, esp. those with little or no "skills" (carpentry, husbandry, etc). Most also expect you to stay for a longer period of time (a week or more) or are only interested in preformed groups.

I have selected four options for potential volunteers. Here are the selection criteria:

1. They are still active, with good connections to the local community
2. They are well-organized, safe and get you working
3. They provide all equipment (free), and can also provide transportation, food and housing (for a fee)
4. They are open to short-term stays by those with various language abilities
5. They are outside of any radiation areas (all in Ishinomaki)
6. I can vouch for them personally

### Peace Boat

<http://peaceboat.jp/relief/>

A Japanese NPO also with NGO status which does work around the world, since 3.11 PB has brought the largest number of volunteers up to Tohoku of any group. They are organized in what some call a "Japanese Way" (bucho, fuku-bucho, hansei-kai, etc.) and get stuff done. Their volunteer policies and needs change with time, but in general, they prefer groups to individual volunteers, and you must have at least one member who is a near-native Japanese speaker. You need to apply and be accepted. They also are very involved with peace education, and in general, a good group to support.

Check out their Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/PBSaigai>

Application information here: <http://peaceboat.jp/relief/volunteer/how-to-apply/>

### JEN

<http://www.jen-npo.org/en/>

An international NPO with a long history which has been doing great work in Tohoku since the start. They are more involved in community service, from soup kitchens to mud removal in individuals' homes, also in Ishinomaki. They are open to those who cannot speak Japanese, and make an effort to place you in the most appropriate situation. You must apply and be accepted, but they are pretty flexible; you can work on a day-to-day basis.

Application information here: [http://jenhp.cocolog-nifty.com/jen\\_blog/2012/03/recruit-volunte.html](http://jenhp.cocolog-nifty.com/jen_blog/2012/03/recruit-volunte.html)

### Nadia

<http://team-nadia.org/>

This is an international group that just started with 3.11, and is still going strong. They are focused more on rebuilding and reconstruction and are now in their "green phase," planting trees and beautifying public spaces. They are open to all nationalities and languages, and well organized, with lots of repeat volunteers (always a good sign). They also try to use what skills their volunteers have to the best ends, when possible. Based in Ishinomaki but will bus people to work-sites also.

Information on application for different trips (usually about 3 days at a time): <http://team-nadia.org/category/trip-form/>

### **Its Not Just Mud**

<http://itsnotjustmud.com/>

This is a smaller group run by Jamie El-Banna (itsnotjustmud@gmail.com) who left his job in Kansai to do relief work, stayed and is now a magnet for all sorts of volunteers. He also has great connections to the local community, and brings together whoever comes up to do whatever locals ask of them. People from all over the world come for days, weeks or months, sharing sleeping and eating spaces. Casual, friendly and open to all, their vibe is a cross between volunteer fire fighters and a commune. They also do a full range of types of work, different each day, often with easier and harder options. Before you go, be sure there is room for you to sleep there.

Check out Facebook: <http://www.facebook.com/ItsNotJustMud>

Volunteer info here: <http://volunteer.itsnotjustmud.com/>

Currently, they are filled up until the end of May, and between June 25-July 28th, but there is usually some wiggle room if this is your must-do.

### **Please note:**

Different periods fill up, so in order to secure a place, contact them now. And remember, when you say you will come to work, they expect you to be there. It is fun--much better than faculty meetings or office work, and maybe cooler than Tokyo.

But you must be flexible. There is down time in all groups (a relief to some, a source of frustration to others), and you have to do the work that is needed. There is usually a range of work, and I have taken 80 year olds on digging trips, who have made great contributions. You also must be over 20 or with a parent/guardian.

You can now get full information on insurance and equipment (both of which are necessary wherever you go) on each of these sites.

*David H. Slater is an associate professor of cultural anthropology in the Faculty of Liberal Arts and the Graduate Program of Japanese Studies at Sophia University, Tokyo. He is the co-editor with Ishida Hiroshi of [Social Class in Contemporary Japan: Structures, Socialization and Strategies](#). He currently is completing a book on youth labor in neoliberal Japan. Contact: [d-slater@sophia.ac.jp](mailto:d-slater@sophia.ac.jp)*