



# The Journey of the Volunteer

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Understanding the Journey of the Volunteer is critical to effectively and sustainably engaging employees in corporate volunteerism. At each stage of the Journey – Stages 1, 2, and 3 – volunteer needs differ. This is a simple guide to recognizing and responding to the needs of volunteers at each stage.

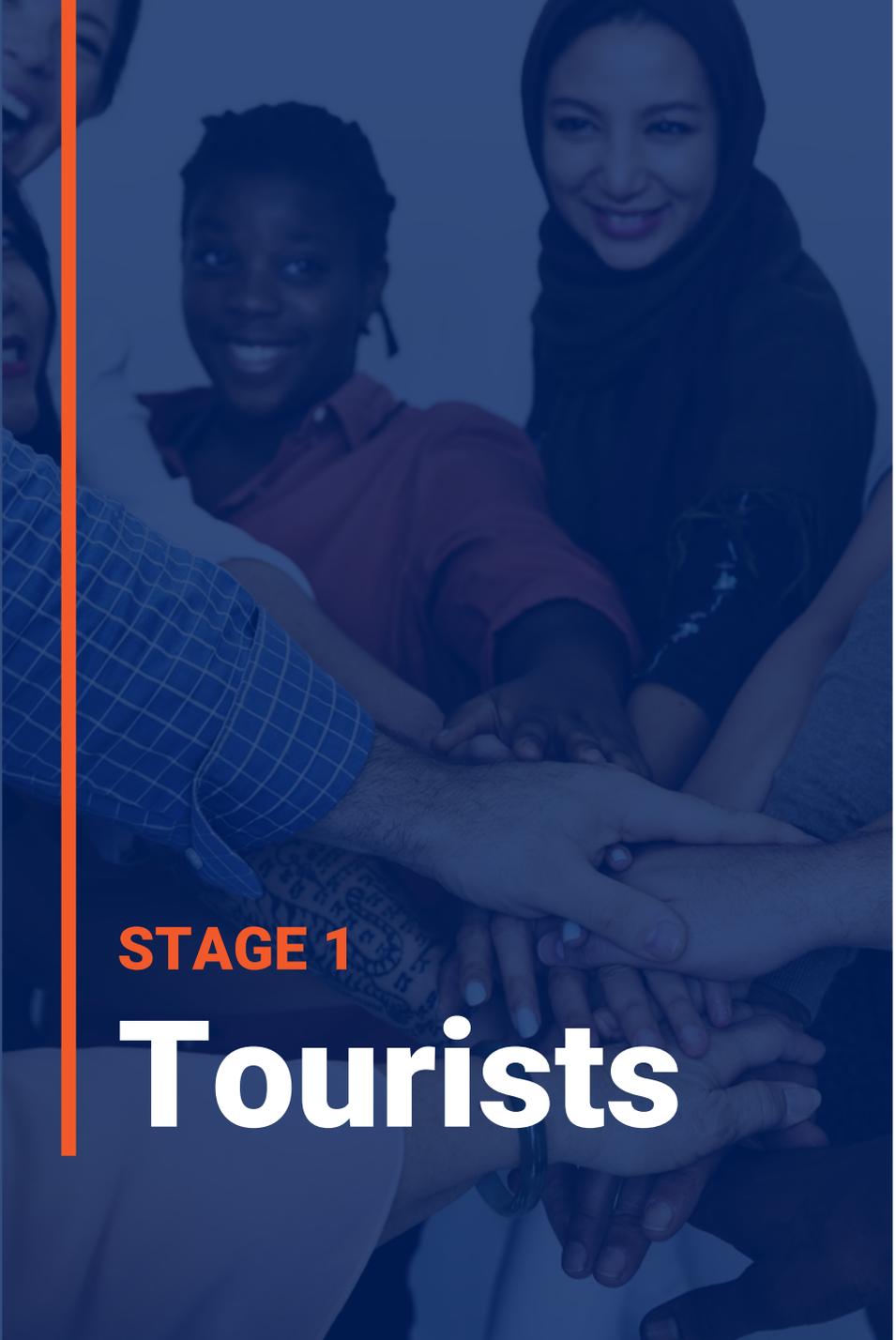




## Volunteering takes us on a **journey**.

There are **three stages** in the journey of the volunteer. At each stage, your volunteers need something different. This is a simple guide to help recognize each stage the volunteer may be at and what they will need.

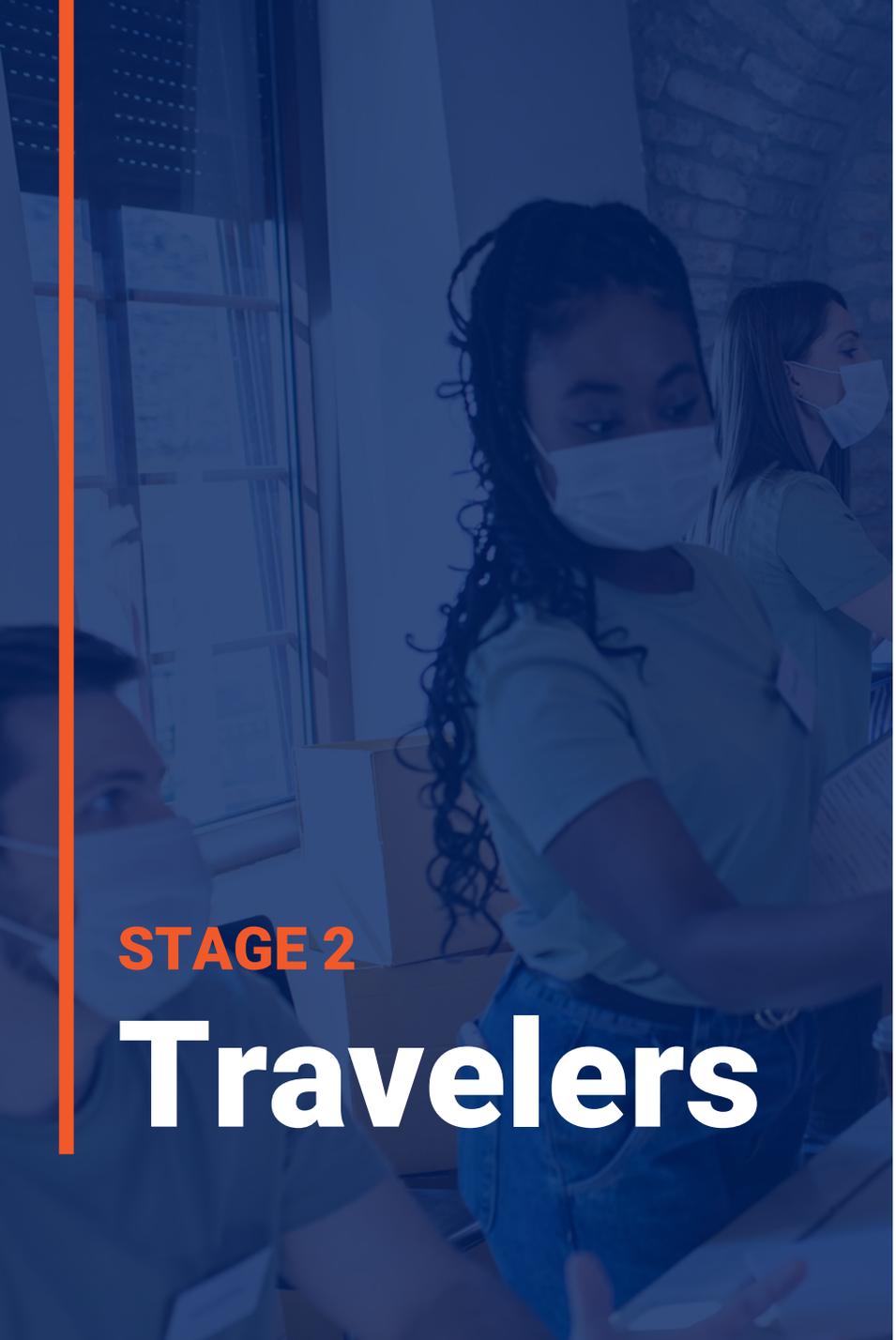
Understanding and being able to identify the three stages of volunteerism equips volunteer leaders to effectively **meet volunteers at their highest level of contribution**, and as a result, create an environment where volunteers can successfully move into new phases of their own volunteer journey.



**STAGE 1**

# Tourists

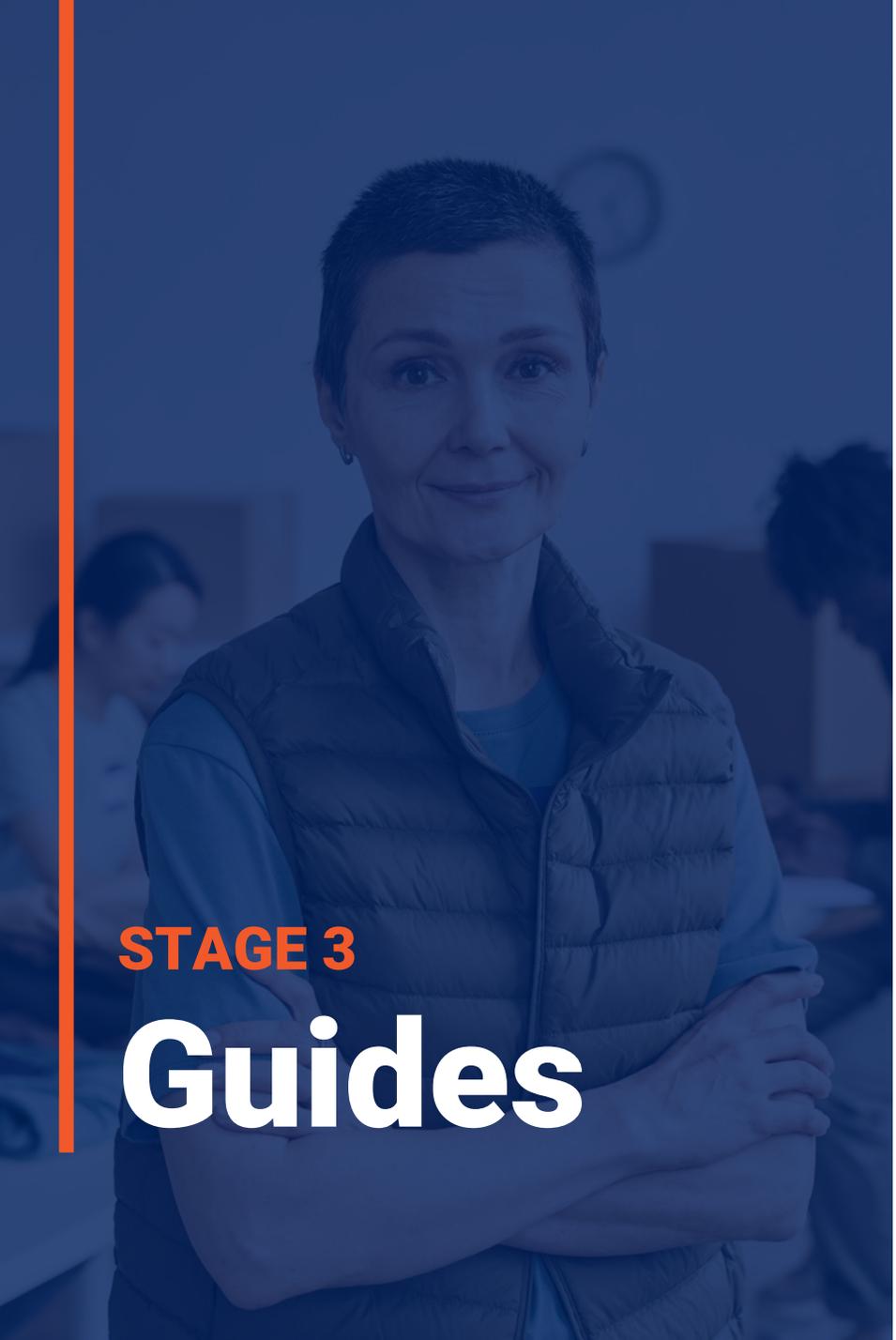
The first stage on the journey of the volunteer is one of **casual curiosity**. Like a tourist visiting a new place for the first time, a first stage volunteer is not yet sure if this experience is the right fit for them. They cannot be forced or coerced into liking it; instead, they **must be given basic, experiential tasks that allow them to look, see and discover**. If they're ready, they'll return to the space and continue through the stages. Tourists consistently make up approximately **70-80%** of any group of employee volunteers.



**STAGE 2**

# Travelers

The second stage is one of **meaningful discovery**. Like a traveler who has begun to feel a sense of belonging to the place they visit, second stage volunteers internalize their motivation for returning. As they own the experience for themselves, they are **ready to take on leadership responsibility and tasks that require increased commitment**. Travelers can be difficult to recognize, but they're worth looking for. Travelers make up about **15-20%** of employee volunteers. They're on their way to becoming advocates and leaders for the volunteer program.



### STAGE 3

# Guides

The third stage in the journey of the volunteer is one of **intentional alignment**. Like a guide who introduces others to the charms of his favorite country, third stage volunteers are motivated by personal, intrinsic reasons. Guides can be trusted to **run the program when no other leader is around and recruit new volunteers** without being asked. Guides make up only **5-10%** of any group of employee volunteers and should receive the greatest percentage of time and energy from their managers.

Being able to effectively guide volunteers is contingent on understanding the **Journey of the Volunteer**:

● **Stage 1: Tourist**  
**“Casual Curiosity”**

- New or infrequent volunteer
- Competing priorities
- Interested in straightforward and immediately rewarding tasks
- May participate again if they have a great experience

● **Stage 2: Traveler**  
**“Meaningful Discovery”**

- Ready to own experiences for themselves
- Ready to take on leadership responsibility and/or increased commitment
- May express tension, boredom, or eagerness

● **Stage 3: Guide**

**“Intentional Alignment”**

- Trusted to run activities when needed
- Naturally able to help others find their way at events
- Understand that while they help, they also benefit from volunteering

If you spot members of your volunteer team exhibiting the below outlined **behaviors**, you can usually tag where they are in the volunteer journey.

● **Stage 1 Tourists might:**

- Prefer to talk only amongst themselves
- Show up late
- Ask questions
- Act very enthusiastic
- Seem overly concerned about safety
- Dress inappropriately for the event
- Seem to “just want to have fun”

● **Stage 2 Travelers might:**

- Express criticism or strong opinions
- Be interested in leadership training
- Show up on time and regularly act like they “know best”
- Direct others at the event
- Have specific questions about “why” and “how”
- Require more effort to manage
- Have very high expectations

● **Stage 3 Guides are:**

- Knowledgeable
- Experienced
- Inclusive
- Deeply connected to the community being served
- Non-judgmental leaders

As you observe volunteers and assess where they are in their journey, here are some ways to **meet them where they are**:

### ● **Stage 1: Tourist**

- Assign specific, straightforward tasks
- Make sure they know who to go to for help and what to expect
- Check in regularly
- Ask for lower levels of commitment
- Introduce them to others

### ● **Stage 2: Traveler**

- Assign higher levels of responsibility and delegate tasks
- Empower them to check in with other volunteers
- Encourage learning opportunities
- Connect them to the nonprofit to learn more about the organization
- Ask them to come to the next event

### ● **Stage 3: Guide**

- Collaborate on designing events
- Empower to connect with nonprofits and lead events
- Train them to give the brief and debrief
- Treat volunteering as a leadership development opportunity
- Empower and amplify their voices

# Putting it into practice

Here are some questions you can ask someone to help you determine if a volunteer is a Tourist, Traveler or Guide. Based on the answers, where would you place this person? Why do you think so?

Question	Y/N
1 You enjoy volunteering, but only when you have the time to spare.	
2 You've spent time reading about the issues you're trying to address through volunteering.	
3 You don't understand why some of your friends and family don't want to volunteer with you.	
4 You find yourself very curious about the issues related to your volunteer activities.	
5 You talk to your friends about the issues and communities you volunteer for.	
6 You often think of solutions that could fix the social issues you're volunteering for.	
7 Your volunteering activities have changed the way you think about social issues.	
8 Volunteering has made you uncertain about some of the things you believe in.	
9 You're not really able to make long term commitments to volunteer.	
10 Volunteering is most enjoyable when it's done with friends or family.	

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# ABOUT REALIZED WORTH

Since 2008, Realized Worth has offered strategic consulting services to some of the biggest brands in the world. We help companies successfully create or evolve their employee volunteer strategy through a comprehensive design, transition and implementation process that results in a scalable, robust employee program. It's our mission to bring meaning to action through our Transformative Volunteering approach, which teaches employees how to practice behaviours that create engaging, effective and impactful volunteer projects for their peers.

With a wide range of over 100 clients including Apple, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, SAP, Altria, Deloitte, Microsoft, Abbott Labs, McDonald's, AstraZeneca, and others, Realized Worth's specialized expertise is uniquely suited for the corporation seeking meaningful impact through its employee volunteer programs.

The co-founders of Realized Worth, Chris Jarvis and Angela Parker, are based in Baltimore, Maryland. The extended team is based throughout the US and Canada. Realized Worth Canada is based in Halifax, Nova Scotia.



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