



## **Great Expectations**

### Volunteering for the Accelerated Cure Project by: Peter Schmidt, friend and volunteer

Dear prospective volunteer,

Welcome to the Accelerated Cure Project! If you're reading this document, then you're considering taking on a potentially rewarding yet challenging role: Accelerated Cure Project volunteer.

I am a volunteer myself. My name is Peter Schmidt, and I have known Art Mellor, Accelerated Cure Project's founder, for over 20 years. We went to college together, worked together, founded a successful high-tech company together – and we're still friends today. That friendship is my connection to Multiple Sclerosis. You probably have your own connection, and that is why you're reading this.

Accelerated Cure Project's volunteers are critical to its success. In 2004, volunteers contributed 3,600 hours of their time, which added the equivalent of 40% more full time staffers. That is terrific leverage. Volunteers also raised \$171,064 in 2004, creating and running successful efforts from the annual Scavenger Hunt to individual letter writing campaigns. Accelerated Cure Project cannot hope to achieve its mission without the many different efforts of its dedicated volunteers.

Volunteering can be hugely rewarding. Not only do you have the satisfaction that comes from a job well done, you can also take hope from the fact that your effort is advancing Accelerated Cure Project in its mission. In a small yet concrete way, you are helping bring the day closer when the cause of MS is identified, and a cure is finally possible.

But volunteering can be challenging, even frustrating. You have to make a real commitment of your time and talents, and money as well. When you volunteer, people will count on you. Both the Accelerated Cure Project staff and the person with MS whom you care about will be depending on you to finish the job. When the demands of the rest of your life conflict with your commitment, that's when you'll really feel the challenge. And if you stop making progress, everyone will be

frustrated, and we all want to avoid that.

That's where this document comes in. I hope it will help you think through the volunteering process, and help you to define a volunteer effort that you – with your own unique set of other commitments and obligations in your life – will be able to succeed with. Keep in mind that even an effort that might seem small to you, successfully completed, will be a real help to Accelerated Cure Project, and much more so than a grand idea which is never fully realized. We thank you sincerely for your interest in helping, and we can't wait to see what you come up with!

### **How This Document Almost Didn't Get Written**

This is a true story. I never meant to write this section of this document. It didn't appear in my first outline, and it definitely wasn't on the list of things that Art, Melissa O'Shea (Development Director) and I brainstormed when they came to meet with me.

Art and Melissa asked me if I would write something to help set volunteers' expectations about how to successfully volunteer for Accelerated Cure Project. Nearly four years of experience had given them many examples of both excellent and disappointing efforts, and they came to me hoping a document like this one could help increase the success rate and decrease the risk of further disappointments. I thought it sounded like a great idea, but I am as busy as the next person, so I looked carefully at my calendar. I saw three free days coming up, so I blocked them off for Accelerated Cure Project and agreed. I told Art and Melissa I would have a draft to them in two weeks.

Well, guess what? Urgent business reared its head, and those three days were eaten up in dealing with it. I did get started on this, but just barely, and in the rush of my “real” life, it sat neglected in a pile on my desk. Days flew by and somehow became weeks, and pretty soon Melissa was having to ask me (nicely!) about my (lack of) progress. You can imagine my embarrassment. It was too ironic that my own project to help make sure volunteer efforts didn't get delayed or dropped was becoming exceedingly delayed and was in danger of being dropped!

What happened? Well, as I learned in compiling the good examples below, I set myself up to struggle by being unrealistic about the demands of this project and the realities of my work and family life. For me, writing projects require large chunks of uninterrupted time. Despite what my calendar showed, as a small business owner and a dad with two kids in elementary school, I just don't *have* large chunks of uninterrupted time. I let my desire to help Accelerated Cure Project override my better judgment about what I could really achieve.

I realize looking back that if a paying client had asked me to write something like this in the same time frame, I would have said no. I try to avoid consulting jobs I am not certain I can finish on time and on budget. But I said yes to Art and Melissa, and that's what started my struggle. I didn't take my proposed volunteer effort as seriously as I would have a "real" job, and that should have been a warning signal. Accelerated Cure Project was counting on me just as much as my paying clients do.

You are reading this now, so you realize that I did manage to complete my commitment eventually. I am not proud, though. I was over six months late on an effort that Accelerated Cure Project really needed, and I caused a lot of frustration for both myself and for Art and Melissa. So here I am, the bad example!

Fortunately, there are better stories than mine below. The lessons to be drawn from their successes should help guide you as you think about what you will be able to realistically achieve. I have boiled them down into a checklist at the end. Use it to assess whether you will be successful with your proposed effort, and you can avoid struggling like I did.

### **Three Good Examples**

Carol Rose, Mike Yashko, and Debbie Mellor are three of Accelerated Cure Project's successful volunteers. You can read about them in the sidebars below. What I want to highlight here is how each of them has played to their strengths in their volunteer efforts. Unlike my struggle with this document, they picked activities that they could fit into their existing commitments. They each found a way to set a series of concrete, short-term goals that would carry them through their efforts. They made their appeals personal, not remote and generic – as Melissa says, "People feel more compelled to give when they understand how the disease is directly impacting the life of someone they love and care about." Our three good examples relied on other people for help, but did not add to Accelerated Cure Project's own workload. Finally, they each found a good measure of both fun and satisfaction in the actual doing of the task itself. These qualities should be the touchstones you apply to your own volunteering.

## **Carol Rose – Going the Distance**

Carol Rose lives in Connecticut. She ran her first marathon in October 2004, and through Accelerated Cure Project's Sense of Purpose Program, asked her family, friends and community to sponsor her efforts by making gifts to the Accelerated Cure Project. She raised over \$8,000. In April of 2005, Carol ran the Boston Marathon with an official number provided by John Hancock, and raised over \$8,700 more for Accelerated Cure Project.

Carol has several personal connections to MS. Originally there was the cousin who struggled with it for many years. Now, in just the past five years, a good friend, her brother in law, and her husband have all been diagnosed. She has responded by directing much of her volunteering efforts toward Accelerated Cure Project.

She believes strongly in her volunteer work. When asked why she volunteers, she says it's to:

- set a good example for her kids,
- set a good example for others around her, and
- keep her motivated towards achieving fitness and self improvement goals – “It is a really good reason to run that extra mile or stay up working on that school project.”

She believes she succeeded because she organized her volunteer effort so that she enjoyed it. Not just the results, but the actual doing. “You definitely want to do something fun, and not burdensome.”

Training for a marathon takes a lot of time out on the roads, building up the miles as you get in shape to go all 26.2 on race day. Carol handled this by making it a family activity. Her older son would do shorter runs with her, or run one loop of her longer routes, while her husband would often keep her company on his bike. Carol's marathon bid became a family effort instead of a solo project.

However, the running by itself didn't raise thousands of dollars. Carol started that with a letter-writing campaign. She wrote to everyone on her 120-person Christmas card list, not to mention everyone at her church and at work. She started by printing three sets of labels: one for the fundraising letter, one for the thank you notes – and one for her Christmas list, while she was at it. That made it a chance to “kill 3 birds with one stone.”

Carol included a self-addressed, stamped envelope with each letter to make sending in a donation easy. Since the race was in October, she got the first mailing out in August. She followed up with another mailing three weeks prior to the race, and a final one just before. Soon, she was receiving three to four

checks in reply every day, a result she calls “Very exciting and inspiring!”

After her letter writing campaign was up to speed, Carol decided to ask the exercise studio where she was training to sponsor her. The people there had seen her piling up the miles, so when she told them the purpose behind her running, they not only made a pledge, they hosted a fundraising event for her.

Carol says the keys to her success were:

- making realistic goals, and allocating the right amount of time to achieve them
- not trying to do too much at once
- setting little, concrete goals, and getting into a routine at completing them
- finding a way to make it fun – for her, it was the involvement of her family

From Accelerated Cure Project's standpoint, what made Carol a star was not just the amount she raised but the fact that she owned her fund raiser. She took the responsibility of asking everyone she could think of, organizing events to support her effort, and organizing the money so that Accelerated Cure Project had all the names of people they needed to thank – with all names written legibly, which might sound trivial at first, but which is actually essential to making sure every donor is thanked. She did her own thank you notes as well, including a marathon picture of herself with each one to personalize for the donor what he or she had helped bring about.

Her efforts have been a great success, and are how Carol has gone the distance to help Accelerated Cure Project in its search for the cure.

**Mike Yashko – Networking Commando**

Mike Yashko is a member of Accelerated Cure Project's Board of Directors. His wife was diagnosed with MS in 2002. He says that he has found in Accelerated Cure Project an organization whose approach to MS “makes sense.” In 2004, he committed to raising \$50,000 for Accelerated Cure Project through his personal contacts and business connections.

But it took more than merely making sense to convince Mike to put his network on the line for Accelerated Cure Project. Mike has a financial and legal background, so the old Russian saying of “trust but verify” is something that he has learned to live by in his 18 years of legal practice. He decided to visit Accelerated Cure Project in Boston to conduct due diligence. His meeting with Art and Melissa must have been a success, because he not only joined the advisory board, he made a personal commitment to make a substantial financial contribution to Accelerated Cure Project every year. He then kicked that off with a \$5,000 personal check.

But that was just the beginning. His next step towards his goal was to conduct a letter writing campaign. He started with Accelerated Cure Project's sample letters, and then tailored them for his audience: the network of people in his “sphere of influence.” These included colleagues, clients, and service providers. In addition to the letters, he also made follow up phone calls. He admits to being a little embarrassed at first to ask these people for money. After all, he has important relationships with them, both professional and personal, and he had never imposed on them in this way before.

What made it easier was that it gradually dawned on him how involved he had been over the years with the “pet projects” of others – assisting with job networking, making contributions to their favorite charities, helping with difficult business situations. This was the first time that he was asking others for help. And, after his visit to Boston and the deepening of his involvement with Accelerated Cure Project, he was certain he was asking for a good cause, and that the money would be put to good use. Later on he realized that he was actually giving people a chance to feel good about donating to a worthy cause that he cares about at to which he has a very personal connection. He doesn't worry about imposing any more.

Mike approached his campaign as a “commando team.” He focused on his strengths, and didn't try to replicate Art's and Melissa's. In order to be “very low maintenance” for the Accelerated Cure Project staff, he put all of the administrative work on himself and his secretary. Mike started by creating a target contact list. He didn't put everyone in his network on it, but decided instead to focus on those with whom he had a personal relationship – people he

felt pretty sure would write a check. Armed with this list, he started writing letters, and following up with calls.

The timing of his appeal helped. He waited until the last two months of the year. Not only is the holiday season the biggest giving season, but Mike was going to be seeing his contacts in person at parties and events. He says that knowing that they'd soon be face to face with him "put a little added pressure on, in a good way."

In order to make consistent progress, he set concrete, daily goals: send five letters per day, hand write five thank yous per day. He put all of his campaign materials in a small box that he carried with him. Whenever he had down time, whether waiting at the gate in the airport, or sitting in a lobby before a meeting, he got the box out and wrote to the next person on his list. By breaking the effort down into a series of small activities, he never felt overwhelmed, and within three months, he had raised over \$30,000 toward his \$50,000 goal.

Mike's fundraising process came naturally to him for the very good reason that it is quite similar to the way he manages his network for business reasons. He did not set out on a project that required him to learn something new. He did not sign up for an activity that he doesn't really like. He made sure he could fit it into his already busy schedule before he got started. All these factors have been key to his success so far.

But his commando effort hasn't stopped there. He has begun broadening his network, making personal contacts with foundations and other people like himself who have personal connections to MS. He is trying to set up a chain reaction by getting each of them to contribute, and even to conduct a letter writing campaign like his. Mike makes the initial contact, and brings in Art and Melissa to establish Accelerated Cure Project's credentials and to help set up the new campaign. By coordinating this teamwork, he makes both himself and Accelerated Cure Project much more effective.

Mike acts out of the courage of his conviction that Accelerated Cure Project is on the right track, and that the organization can be trusted to follow through on his efforts in a high quality way. That's why he has chosen to put his network on the line for Accelerated Cure Project, and why that is working out so well.

**Debbie Mellor – Leading the Hunters**

Debbie Mellor has a personal connection to both MS and to Accelerated Cure Project. It was her husband Art's diagnosis in 2000 that resulted in Accelerated Cure Project's founding in 2001. Debbie was as shocked as anyone at Art's diagnosis – as everyone close to someone with MS is when they hear the news. But like Art, she wanted to do something about it, and over the years she has led several important volunteer efforts for Accelerated Cure Project, including the successful Hunt to Cure MS.

Debbie is a high-powered, high-tech saleswoman. She works out of a home office, and has no one looking over her shoulder to make sure she meets her quota. She spends much of her days “cold-calling” prospects, people she's never met and who generally are not all that interested in talking to her – at least at first. Fortunately, she just plain likes people, and most of the people she calls respond in kind. The fact that she usually exceeds her quota while plying this tough trade shows how effective she is at self-management and dealing with a wide variety of people.

That effectiveness has been critical to her success leading Accelerated Cure Project's annual scavenger hunt, the Hunt to Cure MS. This event has traditionally been one of the top money raisers, bringing in over \$30,000 each year. It sends around 20 teams of three to six people out all over the Metro Boston area in search of obscure objects, funny photos and torturous trivia. Teams have been asked to bring in Super Bowl ticket stubs, a Captain and Teniel CD, and a four leaf clover. They've had to take pictures of themselves kissing a horse, riding a Zamboni, or completely wrapped in tinfoil. And they have had to compose proper limericks, recite the ABCs backwards in unison and even imitate Howard Dean's infamous campaign-ending, howling stump speech for the crowd. A good time is generally had by all.

Pulling this off takes a lot of work by a team of people each year, and leading that effort is where Debbie has shone. Her preparation starts several months before. First the event volunteer staff has to be recruited. There are usually 5-6 people who work on signing up the teams, generating publicity, signing up corporate sponsors, thinking up the hunt items, soliciting prize donations, recruiting judges, and securing a facility. Then the preparations need to be coordinated with the Accelerated Cure Project staff. Wherever possible, Debbie's team handles the details, but they rely on Accelerated Cure Project for coordination and guidance on questions like what date to choose and where to hold it. The Accelerated Cure Project staff also help coordinate the sponsor recruiting where Accelerated Cure Project has an existing relationship with the sponsor that should be taken into account.

Debbie's skill with the phone and email enables her to effectively manage her geographically distributed team throughout the course of the project. After her first Hunt, she took the important step of documenting the process so that she would have a template to use in following years. By distributing this template to her team, she sets everyone's expectations about what needs to get done. She then communicates with them regularly to make sure each person is making progress on the items that they are responsible for. But this description leaves out what makes coordinating all this fun for Debbie – she gets to work with a team of friends that has a lot of laughs in between all the work.

Any fundraising event is a project that requires planning and management, but the Hunt is especially complicated. What makes it such a successful fund raiser is that it pushes most of the fundraising burden, not onto the volunteers directly, but rather onto the participating teams. Each team must raise an initial \$500 in order to register. With 20 teams, that guarantees \$10,000 is brought in more than a month before the event. But beyond the initial amount, the competitive nature of the Hunt guarantees that the teams will raise more than the minimum. Whether it's for pride, out of altruism, or to have a shot at winning one of the many prizes donated by sponsors – or maybe even a bit of all three – the teams on average raise more than triple the minimum amount by the day of the event.

On the morning of the Hunt, Debbie's team of volunteers has swelled to over 20 people with the addition of the master of ceremonies, photographer, scorekeeper, judges, and “day-of” workers. Some of the team will work from 7am to 10pm getting the facility set up, coffee and donuts brought in, teams registered, prizes wrapped, judges assigned...and then there's the cleanup when it's all over. Each volunteer knows their job, which is crucial for the event to run smoothly. Debbie and another experienced volunteer are on hand to manage things and to help sort out any surprises, but it's all the advanced preparation that makes it possible.

At the end of all this effort, success comes in the form of the smiles and laughter from the teams as they show the judges all the crazy things they've collected. It comes in the comments of the sponsors, saying they are glad they participated. It comes from the fact that Accelerated Cure Project staffers could rely on the volunteer team to make the event work without worrying about having to step in and rescue it. But most importantly, it comes from the tally of over \$30,000 raised for the cause – and all the cries of “Just wait 'til next year!”

## There Is More Than One Way to Volunteer to Skin a Cat

When you decide to volunteer for Accelerated Cure Project, the particular cat you are signing up to skin is called “helping Accelerated Cure Project achieve its mission.” Art ranks the possible activities like this:

1. Conducting research or performing clinical trial work – basically being an MS scientist for Accelerated Cure Project
2. Raising money to support Accelerated Cure Project's activities, possibly including joining the Board
3. Increasing Accelerated Cure Project's network through making introductions to donors or MS VIPs, distributing marketing materials or conducting other promotional activities
4. Educating people about MS and Accelerated Cure Project through giving talks or writing papers
5. Volunteering at events on an ad hoc basis

The first one is not something the vast majority of us can tackle, since we aren't scientists. The last one, while valuable in its own right, is not the kind of activity this document is targeting. The biggest help most of us can offer Accelerated Cure Project is to tackle the second and raise a bunch of money so qualified professionals can drive the search for the cure even faster. However, the principles for success for fundraising also apply to efforts directed toward networking and education, so if your inclination runs more towards one of those, this document should still be of use to you.

But what if you don't already have a clear idea for a project? In that case, or even if you do, experience to date strongly suggests that the first project you take on should be a letter writing campaign. It doesn't have to be as comprehensive as Carol's or as big-ticket as Mike's to be of value to Accelerated Cure Project. As long as you own it and run it, any donations that result will make a positive difference.

A letter writing campaign is a low risk way for you to test whether you truly have the time to volunteer. If you can send out 10, 20, or 200 letters, collect the checks that result, write the thank you notes right away, and forward the checks and (legible) contact information to Accelerated Cure Project so they can process them and send out their own thank yous, you will have succeeded. If you find you can't right now – well, that's OK. No one will think the worse of you for trying! You can always pick it up again later when your life calms down a bit.

Once you've succeeded with a letter writing campaign, there are additional volunteering possibilities to consider. As Debbie's experience shows, organizing and running events can be a lot of fun, though it is a lot of work. Please note that I wrote “organizing and running.” Accelerated Cure Project does not have the

staff to take your good event ideas and make them happen. They need *you* to champion your idea, recruit the people you need, arrange for the venue and make it all happen. If you can pull that off, you will achieve hero volunteer status.

However, you have to think very seriously about your ability to be successful. You have to do a better job at that than I did with assessing my resources to write this document. Though it is not a good thing I was so late with it, unlike an event, it didn't have a due date. Struggles like mine just aren't an option for events. Please don't be put off if Art and Melissa respond with caution to your event proposal. After being disappointed by me and others, they have an understandable desire to be sure the event will be organized and run successfully by the volunteer.

Another valuable way to volunteer is to help with activities at Accelerated Cure Project. Would you like to help with the fundraising tasks? How about maintaining the website or computers? If you have the right background, you could contribute to the Cure Map or the MS Repository. But even help with stuffing envelopes, writing thank you notes or filing would be truly appreciated. What you would be signing up for is essentially an unpaid, part-time job. You would be expected to keep regular hours (though what they would be is up to you and whomever you are working with), attend needed meetings, and call in if you might be absent. Just to be clear, you would not be an Accelerated Cure Project staffer officially, but since you'd be taking on tasks that others would depend on, you would need to spend the time you donate working as if you were.

Do you have an idea that is not letter-writing, doing an event, or helping at the office? Accelerated Cure Project would love to hear it – as long as it meets the guidelines listed below.

And remember, you can always do another letter writing campaign!

### **What's In It For Me?**

What is in it for you? Does that question seem out of place?

Since you are reading this document, you are already considering volunteering for Accelerated Cure Project. Most people think of volunteering as altruistic, something they do solely for the benefit of others. The reward they get is the feeling of satisfaction that they can make a difference for a friend or family member with MS. Accelerated Cure Project totally supports that idea, and we truly believe that helping us is the best way there is right now to help speed the day when there is a cure.

But that doesn't have to be the only thing you get out of your volunteering

experience. It can also be a way to work with cool people. Accelerated Cure Project has attracted many of the most distinguished MS researchers in the world to its Scientific Advisory Board, and its Board of Directors boasts many accomplished and influential people from across the country. And the staff couldn't have signed these people up if they weren't pretty sharp themselves. But working with cool people can also mean your own family and friends, like in Carol's and Debbie's cases.

Volunteering can be a way to have fun. For example, the annual Accelerated Cure Project benefit concert has a Halloween theme. If you volunteer to work at it, you can dress up in costume and hand out candy to the kids. Plus, you will get to listen to a variety of creepy songs, performed by professional singers from the Boston area. If you have the ability, you might even audition to perform in it. Volunteers have hosted dinners, a theme dance, a labyrinth walk, golf tournaments, socials – all activities with a lot of fun mixed in with the altruism.

We've noticed volunteers tend to succeed more often when there is something in it for them. What's in it for you?

## **Danger**

Experience has taught Art and Melissa that there are dangers that threaten the success of volunteer efforts. I have touched on several of them above, but I am going to collect them here so that you can see if any apply to you. Are you considering pursuing an effort that:

- You don't really have the time for?
- Requires resources – funding, people, or facilities – that you can't supply?
- Is something you haven't done before? (*The unfamiliarity can be a big barrier to even getting started, let alone succeeding.*)
- Isn't fun for you?
- Relies heavily for its success on PR or response/attendance from an audience of strangers rather than on support from close friends?
- Doesn't help you with your family or business commitments?
- Can't be done in “bite sized chunks” as you go?

If so, you need to figure out how to avoid the danger(s) involved. Can you reduce the scope of the project so it takes less time? Can you involve a friend or family member to share the load, or to make it fun? Can you impress your boss with your community involvement, and perhaps get him/her to sponsor your effort? A little bit of thought may yield a new idea of how to proceed that is much more likely to succeed.

## Accelerated Cure Project Needs You!

Volunteering can be hugely rewarding, but it is usually challenging as well. After covering good and bad examples above, writing about what to volunteer for, how to do so, and what to watch out for, I want to leave you with a few final thoughts:

The first is that good intentions by themselves are not enough. I am proof of that. Getting started and not finishing, like I almost did, usually costs Accelerated Cure Project more than it helps. I hate to think that I wasted Art's and Melissa's time over this, but that's the reality. Good intentions are a start, but they really come to nothing if you don't put them into action and finish what you start.

Second, Accelerated Cure Project truly, truly appreciates everyone who wants to help, even if it turns out that their current commitments make that impossible for now. There is always tomorrow, circumstances can change, and they will still be grateful for help. And keep in mind that even a small effort, brought to completion, is significant. Please consider starting small, Accelerated Cure Project needs you!

Third, consider that being a volunteer doesn't mean that you should not donate generously yourself. If you are going to ask your family, friends and colleagues for their money, shouldn't you put your own money where your heart is and be a lead-off contributor (publicly) for your own campaign?

Last, the good examples above show the tremendous benefits to both you and to Accelerated Cure Project when volunteer efforts go well. What they don't show is the progress these efforts fuel, the work they enable that is already having a real, positive impact on the conduct of MS research. Accelerated Cure Project is pushing with everything they have to accelerate the search, and your support can only make it go faster.

Best of luck!



Peter H. Schmidt  
Volunteer

P.S. If this document has led you to the conclusion that you cannot commit to a volunteer effort right now, please don't be discouraged – you can still help. Writing a generous check can have a significant impact, and may be a lot easier!

## **Accelerated Cure Project Volunteering Checklist**

- Have you completed a letter-writing campaign successfully for Accelerated Cure Project?
- Describe your volunteering idea in 2-3 sentences:
- What will Accelerated Cure Project get out of this if you succeed?
- What will be the cost to Accelerated Cure Project if you begin this effort but do not complete it?
- Do you have the time for this effort? How much current unscheduled time do you have per week? If none, what are you going to defer in favor of this project?
- Can you supply all the required resources – funding, people, facilities or audience – that are needed?
- Have you done the needed activities before?
- How will this activity be fun for you?
- How will this activity help you with your family or business commitments?
- Briefly describe how you will break this activity into small, achievable chunks or goals:
- Have you discussed this activity with Accelerated Cure Project staffers and received buy-in?