

4 ways volunteering benefits ... you

More than 1 billion people around the globe volunteer to help others. Whether working in a soup kitchen to feed the hungry or using your skills to help the needy, volunteers develop new skills while helping their communities.

Consider these great reasons to volunteer.

It develops your job and leadership skills

According to [Forbes](#), volunteer work is one of the best ways to hone the leadership skills needed for top executive positions in the business world. Volunteering for the board of a nonprofit organization, for instance, can offer a young professional executive experience she would not find in her early professional life.

In a nationwide survey, one in five volunteers in Australia said they had learned skills that would help their current or future employment prospects. 26 percent said volunteering had helped them acquire an accreditation or qualification.

It adds to your country's economic output

Unpaid economic work adds value to national economies. A survey in Bangladesh estimated the number of volunteers in that country as 16 million and their economic contribution at \$1.66 billion. In Britain, the Office for National Statistics says volunteers contribute \$37 billion to the British economy. That's 1.5 percent of British GDP.

Volunteers in Johannesburg, South Africa, deliver food and clothes to a local charity. (© AP  Images)

It changes your government for the better

A recent United Nations [report](#) says citizen volunteers help make governments more responsive and accountable to their citizens. It cited crowdsourced mapping of post-election violence in Kenya and citizen volunteers monitoring air quality in China as examples where volunteerism resulted in policy change.

It makes you healthy

Not only is volunteering good for the world around you, it's good for your health — both mental and physical. Studies have shown that volunteering makes the volunteer feel more socially connected and helps ward off feelings of loneliness and depression. A study from Carnegie Mellon University suggests that adults who volunteer regularly are less likely to develop high blood pressure, a contributor to heart attacks, strokes and premature death.

[When she sings about her rights, the president listens](#)

State Dept./D.A. Peterson 

“Find the biggest platform you can,” said Grace Jerry when asked for her advice on bringing about change, “and add your voice.” Jerry, a Nigerian gospel singer, has a big voice. And when introducing President Obama at a gathering of 500 young African leaders, she took full advantage of it. The journey that brought Jerry to Washington began with personal tragedy 13 years ago, when she lost the use of her legs in an auto accident and learned how people with disabilities can be marginalized. She had sung in her church choir before the accident, but for a time afterward, she was depressed and lost interest in singing. As she recovered, she got serious about singing again and decided to use her voice to advocate for others with disabilities. “I want to shift the perception of people with disabilities from being viewed as those who need help to being viewed as [human beings with rights](#),” Jerry said.

Jerry introducing Obama. As Miss Wheelchair Nigeria, she expanded the fight for disability  rights across Africa. (State Dept./D.A. Peterson)

Last year, she applied and was chosen for the [Young African Leaders Initiative’s](#) Mandela Washington Fellowship, which brings 500 people from sub-Saharan Africa to the U.S. to meet others working for change. “I connected with the fellow from Ethiopia who happened to be a polio survivor, and he’s very active in research and data on challenges facing people with disabilities in Ethiopia,” Jerry said. “I met a guy from Sierra Leone with a disability who’s a human rights lawyer.” The three now work together to “create a more inclusive Africa.” Jerry’s singing attracts attention to any issue she trumpets. Her tribute to YALI called “E Go Happen” received 100,000 views in its first 24 hours online. Likely as not, it reached the ears of someone at the White House who chose her to introduce Obama when he spoke to the Mandela fellows.

When introducing the president, Jerry said that during her visit to America, thanks to the [Americans with Disabilities Act](#) she had experienced “what inclusion and access should be. And I am going back to Africa to make sure that that dream becomes a reality.” When the president came to the podium, he said, “Following Grace is a little bit like following Michelle,” referring to his wife. “You’re thinking, ‘I’m not going to be *that* good.’”

What are the Benefits of Service to a Greater Cause?

It is service to a cause greater than oneself that inspires the greatest form of leadership.  Serving each other is in our genetic makeup. We are meant to take the time to give back to our communities, despite the common misperception that life is only about getting what is owed to you. Service doesn't have to be a choice between acting in one's own self-interest and acting in the best interests of others, because giving back can be as fulfilling and enriching for the volunteer as for the community that receives the extra help.

Some of the benefits that volunteerism provides are straightforward, such as resume and network building. Yet, many of the benefits of volunteering are immeasurable. When I volunteer, I feel joy and fulfillment. I grow in my own abilities and skill sets. I learn about the world around me and about the ways that I can help to work for justice in my community. I am enriched by each relationship that I create along the way, and I have fun meeting other like-minded people who may have grown up in a completely different community from my own.

Now more than ever, communities are realizing the impact of volunteer experience on developing well-rounded citizens. Many high schools and colleges in America require students to commit a certain number of community-service hours prior to graduation. Employers in America find candidates to be more attractive when they have volunteer activities on their resumes. Our AmeriCorps volunteers at City Year find more job opportunities and grow their professional networks after committing their hours of service with us. For our AmeriCorps volunteers, serving with City Year is often the catalyst that leads them into careers in teaching, public policy, other nonprofits, or law firms. There is no limit to how much our national service organization opens doors for our young idealists.

At City Year, we believe that the youth of our communities carry the idealism, the energy and the unique solutions to face the challenges that face our society. As an organization, City Year's vision is that one day the most commonly asked question of a young person will be: "Where are you going to do your service year?" Think of how much it would change our societies if our young people were expected to complete one year of direct service to their communities as a rite of passage into the working world. The future of our communities rests on the shoulders of those who are willing to voluntarily make the world a better place. If we are not happy with our communities, then it is our obligation to do something positive to change them.

In my upcoming #YALICHAT, I welcome questions on the benefits of volunteerism in a community, on how to inspire community participation, and on motivating and attracting volunteers toward a cause.

Jeff Franco is vice president and executive director of City Year Washington, DC, a nonprofit organization whose teams of diverse young adults commit to a year of full-time service keeping students in school and on track to graduate. Since joining the organization in 2008, he has quadrupled the number of students and schools served, doubled the size of the staff and more than doubled the organization's fundraising capacity. He has led the development and implementation of a strategic plan that will again grow City Year Washington, DC's size and impact to reach at least

half of the students who drop out of school in Washington.

What Mandela taught me about leadership

While spending time researching a book, Richard Stengel (left) learned a lot from Nelson Mandela. (VOA) 

For a couple of years in the early 1990s, Richard Stengel spent nearly every day with the late [Nelson Mandela](#), collaborating on Mandela's biography, *Long Walk to Freedom*. Now an undersecretary at the U.S. Department of State and author of a book titled *Mandela's Way*, Stengel found himself recently in front of an audience of young Africans at the 2015 Mandela Washington Fellowship Summit in Washington, D.C.

They had come to the U.S. to study leadership for several weeks at U.S. colleges and ended in Washington, where they met President Obama. It was here that Stengel shared lessons on leadership he had learned on the African continent from Mandela. Stengel had gleaned a lot from the man he — like many in South Africa — calls “Madiba.” The undersecretary said Madiba was a man who “wanted to disabuse people that he was a superhero, that he didn’t experience the same emotions as everybody else.” Here are three things he taught Stengel:

1. It's okay to be afraid

Stengel recalled a time when Mandela was flying to Natal in a small airplane. “Madiba was reading a newspaper,” Stengel said. (Madiba loved newspapers, having been deprived of them for 27 years in prison.)

A bodyguard who had never flown told the pilot nervously that the propeller was not working. The pilot answered, “We know about this, and we’ve called ahead.” The pilot said the airport crew would put foam on the runway and station firetrucks nearby. “Most of the time it’s not a problem at all,” he said.

Mandela listened and went back to reading. But after landing, Mandela said, “Man, I was terrified,” and when Stengel registered surprise, Mandela said, “Richard, it would be irrational not to be afraid.”

“Courage is not the absence of fear,” Stengel said. “Courage is directing that fear.”

“It was an amazing experience,” Richard Stengel said about his time traveling with Nelson Mandela. (© AP Images) 

2. It's okay to be bitter

When speaking to Stengel, people often express amazement at Mandela's lack of bitterness after being released from prison.

But Mandela *was* wounded and bitter about what happened to him, Stengel said. The leader diverted those feelings by focusing on a noble goal: "to create this multiracial, free, democratic South Africa."

"He made incredible efforts. I think they were strategic too. ... He came out of prison to have meetings with his old guards, and he would go back and see the old apartheid leaders of South Africa. He would say, so many times, "The past is the past. Forget about the past.'"

3. But be willing to step forward

Born in the remote part of Transkei, Mandela was the son of a village leader who was counsel to the tribal king. The father died of a heart attack when the son was just 12 years old, and afterward young Mandela was raised by the king alongside the king's own son.

Mandela "listened to stories of African leadership from the 15th and 16th centuries — brave African kings before the era of colonialism. He was steeped in African leadership," Stengel said.

That upbringing, Stengel said, informed what Mandela said about leading: "It's simple. It is the willingness to lead ... to step forward and say, 'I've got this. I'm going to do this.'"

Stengel told his audience, all members of the Young African Leaders Initiative, that Mandela would be "so happy" to know they are preparing to meet the future challenges of the African continent. (State Dept./D.A. Peterson)

[#Africa4Her Generates Support for Women and Girls: Olivier Nathacia, South Africa](#)

We asked some of the many YALI Network members who in March made an [#Africa4Her](#) pledge to invest in women and girls in their community how they have fulfilled that pledge. Here is Olivier Nathacia's story.

Olivier Nathacia wants to close the opportunity gap for women and girls. (Courtesy of Olivier Nathacia)

I have pledged to invest my time, knowledge and the other resources accessible to me to improve and empower the lives of women and girls within my community.

As a young woman residing in South Africa, I noticed that there is a gap regarding support of women's development and growth. Women are still sidelined, especially those residing in less privileged areas.

I also experienced the challenges that most young women and girls come across, especially in the corporate and business arenas. I realized that women are still severely hampered by discrimination, lack of resources and economic opportunities, limited access to decision-making and gender-based violence.

I volunteered because I want to be that ripple of change that will close the gap and become part of a generation that makes a difference — a generation that changes obscure obstacles within society about women and girls through entrepreneurship, public innovation and leadership.

I have learned that service is important. More especially when you work with the community, you need to know how to serve people, communicate with them, have time for them, show them that you care. Most of all I learned what it means to be disciplined and be a people's person.

Through volunteering, I learned that leadership is not for the faint-hearted. I have learned what it means to connect and how to build a network that will transform this nation.

Olivier Nathacia, left, with two  of the women she helps through her community volunteer work. (Courtesy of Olivier Nathacia)

Most importantly, I learned that women and girls are strong leaders by nature — they thrive in every situation or circumstance. They vouch for justice, yet they need support in order to achieve whatever they want to accomplish in life. They need a platform to share their knowledge, to network and build each other up.

This experience through #Africa4Her has made me a creative leader and inspired me to continue with the journey I have embarked on.

I can now connect and communicate better. Being amongst women and girls all the time has changed my perception of how women deal and do things from different circumstances of their lives.

Service is important when you work with the community.

On August 28, 2015, we will once again host an event that focuses on young women and girls. The event will be about the importance of exercising and healthy living.

Although it is still hard for me to get all the support I need from government in order to make things happen within my community, I encourage myself to keep going because my passion is assisting young women and girls in every way possible.

More than 1,000 YALI Network members made an [#Africa4Her](#) pledge. They represent 47 countries, and 54 percent of them are men. If you made an [#Africa4Her](#) pledge and would like to share your story, please email us at YALINetwork@state.gov and use the subject line "[#Africa4Her](#)."

Claude Grunitzky Discusses Entrepreneurship in Latest #YALICHAT

Last week Claude Grunitzky joined the YALI Network for a three-day #YALICHAT on Facebook about entrepreneurship. Claude Grunitzky, founder of the multinational company TRACE, and instructor of the YALI Network Online Course lessons [Creating a Business Plan](#), [Identifying Your Markets](#) and [Pitching Your Business Ideas for Investment](#) is a successful entrepreneur who knows how to get a new business off the ground.

He answered questions about how to secure funding and what makes a business successful, as well as shared personal experiences he has endured as an entrepreneur. During the three-day chat, Claude engaged with YALI Network members and gave them a better idea of what it takes to be a successful entrepreneur. Here are some highlights.

How to secure funding:



(Claude received many questions about raising capital and securing funding, to see his answer read his blog post at yali.state.gov/how-can-i-secure-funding-for-my-new-business/).

How to balance monetization and product development:



How to identify business partners:



How entrepreneurship helps countries develop:



How to get capital when you are unemployed:



How to find the right mentor:



Why passion is vital to entrepreneurship:



How to determine if your business is successful:



[Join the YALI Network](#) to get updates and join in on future #YALICHATs.

Entrepreneur Counters Community's 'Food Poverty'

Benedicte Mundele, right, and a neighbor grind food for her canteen. (Courtesy of Benedicte Mundele) 

"I want young people to change their thinking and not to believe that it is better overseas. In the DRC and Africa there are more opportunities than anywhere." — Benedicte Mundele, founder of Surprise Tropicale.

Before she was 10 years old, Benedicte Mundele was making her own money.

Born with a love of healthy food, Mundele began her culinary career when she was just 7 and her mother allowed her to set up a fresh juice stand outside her mother's restaurant in Boma in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Every year, the young entrepreneur's biggest day for business was June 30, Congo's Independence Day. Holiday customers on their way to the restaurant flocked to her stand to buy fruit juice and to support her initiative.

In secondary school, Mundele nourished her interests first at the Elynd Institute in Kinshasa, which had a culinary course, then at the Lycée Technique et Professionnel de Kimbondo, which offered a culinary and hotel program.

When she was 16, she joined the Kuvuna Foundation, which her father led. The foundation trains young Congolese in leadership and entrepreneurship. "I was always dreaming to one day have a big business in the food industry," she says.

She started Surprise Tropicale, which turns locally grown tropical foods into juices and chips while promoting healthy lifestyles. The company began a canteen service that serves healthy breakfasts to Kuvuna Foundation members.

"The food poverty in my country inspired my project," she says. "We have many raw products in my country — coconut, plantain, potato, ginger, passion fruit, papaya and pineapple among others — but not enough food. You go to the supermarket and everything is imported from another country. They take the fruit and vegetables grown here and transform it into a product, often with added preservatives, and then import it back to our country for more expensive prices" that many can't afford. That leads to malnutrition, Mundele explains.

As her business grew, Mundele learned about the food industry, farming, business, the logistics of food delivery and customer preferences. Initially, customers didn't trust locally produced food or food products. She says that another challenge was convincing customers to adopt a healthy lifestyle. Still another challenge was acquiring all of the appropriate food processing equipment.

Mundele also supplies produce to nearby shops and runs her own take-away. The venture makes

around \$300 a month. Mundele plans to supply local supermarkets, develop a network of farmer-suppliers, and open outlets in Kinshasa and in other communities in Congo.

Mundele says her parents always encouraged her “to believe that I could succeed in what I love doing.” She credits her teachers with giving her guidance about the food industry and staff at the Kuvuna Foundation and African Leadership Academy in South Africa with providing her with the books and other information resources she needed to start a business.

“Most of all, I grew my business by developing a ‘Just do it’ attitude,” she exclaims. She next wants to learn more about food transformation and conservation.

Mundele shares the spirit of support by mentoring young women entrepreneurs and volunteering to assist underprivileged girls in Kinshasa. She serves as curator of the Global Shapers Hub in Kinshasa, part of a global network of youth-led groups initiated by the World Economic Forum, and is vice president of the Dynamic Women group at Catholic University of Congo.

Mundele’s entrepreneurial vision and efforts led to her selection as a 2014 finalist for the Anzisha Prize, a competition that recognizes African entrepreneurs ages 15-22 who bring positive change to their community. The prize is sponsored by the African Leadership Academy and the MasterCard Foundation. In 2015, the World Economic Forum named Mundele one of three young women who are using entrepreneurship to solve problems in Africa.

“I want young people to change their thinking and not to believe that it is better overseas. In the DRC and Africa there are more opportunities than anywhere else,” Mundele says.

"We Have to Adapt to Change"

Julian Kyula (Courtesy of Julian Kyula) 

“We have to adapt to change as quickly as possible. Those who adapt to change are those who are going to survive.” — Julian Kyula

Julian Kyula, 39, founded and runs Mobile Decisioning Africa (MoDe) in Nairobi. The company, launched in 2010, holds a niche in the mobile money market — nanofinance.

Kyula describes nanofinance as the lending of very small amounts of money, say 20 dollars or pounds. “At any time of the day, someone in the world is in desperate need of a very small amount of money,” says Kyula, whose expertise is in business development. He says the concept of nanofinance “started in Africa, then came out to the world. Most of the time it’s the other way around.”

“Our aim is to make sure that those that don’t necessarily have banks or banking relationships, or even if they do, are able to access minimum amounts of cash,” he explains. Having expanded the

business to nearly 20 markets, Kyula wants to make MoDe a global company.

Kyula suggests that given the current environment of constant change, entrepreneurs should experiment with new concepts. He thinks that students and entrepreneurs should try out new ideas and concepts. "Change is the only constant thing in life."

"Dealing with the dynamics of a startup is a challenge," he says. Yet he acknowledges that it is also rewarding. "It's an amazing thing to create [a venture] because you are experimenting."

The entrepreneur, who left business school before graduating, embraces failure as a learning tool. "Everyone has failure," he notes. "Build resilience. You have to bounce back."

Asked if he encountered hurdles in building his business, Kyula says: "It was very tough. We learned some very major lessons," like finding people with the right skills.

"You've got to make sure that you customize yourself for the region that you are in and be very smart in business," he adds. "People would start to ask, 'Are you really capable of carrying out such a business?' We were lucky to demystify those concerns through large companies we were already working with."

Kyula, who founded Quest Holdings before starting MoDe, advises young people to immediately put their ideas to work.

"Don't wait 10 or 15 years after school to start your dream. ... Go for it. Don't let money stop you. Don't let anything stop you. If you can create and innovate, money will find you."

[Are you an entrepreneur seeking capital? Read this.](#)

By: Andreas Zeller

Over the past five years, more than \$1 billion in fresh capital has been allocated to invest in Small and Growing Businesses (SGBs) in East Africa alone. More than 100 investment funds manage these resources, actively seeking businesses to support that make an impact.

Unfortunately, only a fraction of this capital has been deployed so far. According to investors, this is not for lack of exciting entrepreneurs with great ideas. The problem is that most of these entrepreneurs are not "investment ready."

At Open Capital, we've spent five years helping entrepreneurs prepare for investment. In this post, we want to share some of the most important, yet overlooked, requirements we hear from Africa-focused SGB investors. As an entrepreneur seeking capital, make sure to ask yourself these tough questions before approaching investors. It will make it all the more likely you are successful.

Planning execution

Nearly every entrepreneur we've met has an impressive growth plan showing how far they could grow in a few years - it's often exponential! That's important, but not helpful for savvy investors unless it's combined with a clear plan of how you will get your business to reach those goals. If you project to sell your new software to millions of African consumers, make sure you also plan what the first 100 days of operations will look like after you receive investor capital. Be ready to answer questions like: Who will you hire? If you produce products, how will you distribute them to reach your consumers? How will you overcome logistical challenges in Africa?

Prioritizing opportunities

In most African markets, opportunities abound, and it's easy to want to do it all. But savvy investors understand the value of focus, given how critical execution is to business success, especially in Africa. When you present your business to an investor, make sure you clearly explain what opportunities you will pursue today, and what opportunities you'll be better positioned for later.

Proving commitment

Investors realize not all entrepreneurs have a lot of money. But they want to know that business founders are intensely committed to their venture and won't move on to the next new thing when they hit hurdles, as all entrepreneurs do. As an entrepreneur seeking capital, try to gather evidence for investors to show how committed you are in your venture. Even if you haven't put in much money, if it's a large percentage of your total savings, it's still significant! If you've committed years of research or sacrificed other opportunities, make sure to point that out.

Demonstrating transparency

Not all entrepreneurs are scrupulous, and many investors have had bad experiences in the past. To prove you're different, demonstrate how you've accounted for your business' cash flows and explain how you intend to do this in the future. Set clear milestones for your growth plans and offer to send investors frequent reports of your progress toward these goals. Offer to "stage" [ask for in separate stages] the capital you require over time and agree to preconditions that you will meet before requesting each next investment.

Andreas Zeller is Managing Partner at Open Capital Advisors, an organization that provides advisory services to help high-potential businesses streamline their operations and plan for growth and capital raising. Before joining Open Capital, Andreas worked for Citigroup and Credit Suisse as an investment banker as well as the IFC making investments in frontier markets. He also has experience in the technology startup world. You can learn more about him and his organization by visiting [Open Capital's website](#).

How Can I Secure Funding for My New Business?

By Claude Grunitzky

As I spend more and more time mentoring young entrepreneurs all over Africa — and on other continents — I get asked a lot of questions. Most of the questions relate to funding. Young entrepreneurs — and also older entrepreneurs — are always wondering how they should go about raising money for their company. After all, it is very difficult to grow a company when financial resources are lacking. An entrepreneur needs money to pay staff, to support marketing expenses, and also to pay regular bills like the rent and electricity.

When I get asked about funding, I usually say that there are two types of funding: debt and equity. Debt is when you take out a loan from friends, family, or the bank. Equity is when you get someone to invest in your company in exchange for a share (equity) in the company. My recommendation is to save money (as much money as possible) before you start a business and fund the startup expenses with your personal savings. So if the business fails, then you only have yourself (or the market) to blame. And at least you haven't wasted anyone else's money.

If you have no personal savings, then the next best option is a loan from friends and family. In that case, you will need to explain, in the clearest way, your business idea. And see if your friends and family believe in the idea — and in you — enough to take that risk. If no one, and I mean absolutely no one, wants to lend you money, then you may want to reconsider the venture and question the greatness of your idea, or of your own persuasion skills. That is usually not a good start. And you would be mistaken to expect that a bank will lend you money when your own friends and family are unwilling to part with their cash.

When you are launching a new business, the best kind of money, in my opinion, is equity. If you are able to convince an investor to release funds in exchange for shares in your company, then you have someone who believes in you, someone who is willing to take a big risk on you and the venture. What kind of risk am I talking about? Well, for the investor (or investors) the risk is that they might lose all their money, and their shares would be worthless if the company failed. Many investors are willing to take such a risk, but there are a few things a budding entrepreneur needs to know before heading down the equity road.



First, the entrepreneur will need to practice the “pitch” and articulate the new company's value proposition in just a few simple sentences. In doing this, it is important to break the value proposition into actual market value so that the new company appears to be unique in what it is offering. There is absolutely no reason to start a new company if you intend to do the same thing other companies are already doing.

Most investors will want to know if the new company's value proposition is truly unique. This means they will want to know if the company can create — and sustain — what is called a “competitive advantage.” Before approaching an investor, every entrepreneur should look in the mirror and ask

himself the following question: “Why would my target customer pay for my product (or service)? How much value does my product (or service) create for her (or him)?” This honest exercise helps the entrepreneur to think about competition, and how he intends to differentiate himself. Who do we want to compete with? Why? Where are they strong? Where are they weak? Why will some of their customers choose us, instead of them?

If the investor likes the idea and the core team, and is convinced of the value proposition and of the new company’s ability to stand out in the marketplace, then they will want to know more about how the company intends to compete. This is when the entrepreneur should be prepared for the toughest questions, the ones that relate to the ability to consistently satisfy customers who are in the target market.

[In my upcoming #YALICHAT](#), I will help young entrepreneurs prepare for the tough questions. Answering questions honestly (and precisely) is a key to securing funding for your business.

Claude Grunitzky is the founder of TRACE, the first multinational media company focused exclusively on producing, aggregating, distributing and promoting urban music and culture via digital media and special events around the world, and a co-founder of TRUE, a new MIT-incubated media venture. He also teaches YALI Network Online Course lessons on [Creating a Business Plan](#), [Identifying Your Markets](#) and [Pitching Your Business Ideas for Investment](#).
