

Best Practice Creating an Employee Volunteering Program

Guide

Helping involve your employees in volunteering opportunities can be extremely beneficial for not only the organisations they volunteer for but broaden your employee's outlook and attitude and add greatly to productivity, team-building and organisational culture.

The '[Business Case for Corporate Volunteering](#)' 2014, states; 'For employees; professional development, increased satisfaction and engagement, and improved health and wellbeing will ultimately save the company money in higher staff retention rates and attracting top talent'. Similarly, the [State of Volunteering Report](#) (2020) found that 56.9% of volunteers believed their volunteering added an average of 35.9% value to their productivity in their paid employment.

Building meaningful employee volunteer programs is a two-sided task for both corporates looking to set up a volunteer program and for volunteer-involving organisations (VIOs) looking to host employee volunteers. Make sure that you considering the following principles:

- Identify your purpose
- Consider your capacity
- Identify potential partners and reach out
- Agree on shared objectives and start scoping
- Measure success

For corporates

Identify your purpose

Why do you want to involve your employees in volunteering? Is it about community impact and your larger social responsibility? Is it about team building? Is it about employee engagement? Upskilling your employees?

Working out the aims of the program may influence the type of opportunities/organisations you look to partner with. For example, if team building is your ultimate objective you might need to ensure that the VIO you partner with can accept large groups of individuals volunteering together. If you are looking to upskill your employees, you might be more focused on identifying skilled volunteer opportunities with the VIO you partner with. All these considerations are important to think through before you reach out to potential partners.

Consider your capacity

How much time can employees give to volunteering each year? Is this a day per year per employee, or more? Can teams share their volunteer days? Answers to these questions will likely be determined by your executive team.

Develop a draft volunteer policy if your organisation doesn't already have one. Ensure sure you consider leave for volunteering, whether the organisation will cover any volunteer checks necessary, and whether the volunteering will be coordinated by a central staff member.

Identify prospective partners and reach out

Getting a few staff members to research organisations out there that you can support is an important first step to get your program started. Staff may want to reach out to other staff to identify causes of interest, or organisations that are aligned to areas of your strategic plan.

Once you have identified a prospective partner VIO reach out to them to see what is possible. It may take a little time to find the best contact at the VIO as not all VIOS have an identified Employee Volunteering coordinator. Be patient but do follow up if you are keen to establish a relationship.

Agree on shared objectives and start scoping

Once you have decided that you will move forward with a partner, agree on your shared objectives for the program and start scoping possibilities. Ask to see their strategic plan and suggest where you can add value - VIOs without established employee programs often don't know where to start, particularly if they are very small. By examining their strategic plan, you may be able to work together to identify projects with incredible outcomes for the VIO. Does their plan mention improving communications? Maybe your web development team or communications team can upskill the VIO or assist them to set up improved reporting?

Measure success

It important to consider from the start what is defined as success for yourself and the VIO. Is it a certain outcome for a project? Is it a certain number of participants from your workplace? Whatever your measure of success is it's important that you and the VIO discuss it upfront so you can report back.

For volunteer-involving organisations

Identify your purpose

Why are you setting up an employee volunteer program? Is it to build a longstanding relationship with a corporate organisation? Is it to increase awareness of your organisations vision, mission, and program suite? Is it to build organisational capacity? Whatever your purpose – this may influence the type of volunteer experience you want to provide. For example, if it's about building awareness of your vision, mission, and program suite you might consider whether Employee Volunteers (EVs) can hear from clients directly to see the impact of their actions/ your programs.

Consider your capacity

Do you actually have capacity to take on EVs? Who will run inductions and ensure any volunteer checks are processed and submitted? Can this be handed by your existing team? Do you need to apply for funding to get a program up and running? Be realistic about providing support to employee volunteer programs. This may look different depending on the frequency of corporate involvement so be sure to consider this.

Identify prospective partners and reach out:

Is there a prospective partner who you think would support your vision and mission? If so reach out to them – the worst they may say is no! Think about why they might like to be involved with you. Perhaps they have identified goals that align to yours in their corporate social responsibility CSR plan. Or perhaps the volunteer opportunity is aligned to what they do? i.e. if its skilled volunteering in website development – approach a tech company.

Even if the corporate that you approach might not be offering their employees a volunteer program at this time, they may be able to connect you to other like-minded organisations who do have programs or may be able to circulate your identified opportunities to their employees who can sign up as individuals.

Agree on shared objectives and start scoping

Once you have decided that you will move forward with a corporate partner agree on your shared objectives for the program and start scoping possibilities. Send them your strategic plan and ask them to suggest where they can add value in addition to other roles you might have already identified. Sometimes it can be hard to know how best a corporate organisation can assist. Get them to talk through the type of teams/skills that they have and see if anything generates an idea to help build your capacity.

Measure success

Corporate organisations need to ensure that the time their employees are giving is generating outcomes. Make sure you clarify with the corporates what their measure of success is to ensure you can assist them with any reporting that they have. Above all to build a good employee volunteer program relationship be clear on your expectations, limitations and capacity.

More information

For those that have established EV relationships but are struggling to find appropriate tasks for EV volunteers, consider:

- Do you have additional tech needs that EV can support you with? Can someone schedule a training session for your org/volunteers via Zoom? This could be on any major platform, excel or outlook training, teams training etc,
- Can you talk to your corporate partners about your existing programs/outcomes, so they are ready to reengage when they have volunteers available?