



## How to...

# Set up an employee volunteering programme

## Community Investment

### What is employee volunteering?

Employee volunteering, where staff donate time and skills during work hours to tackle social issues, is an effective and powerful way for businesses to invest in their people and communities, as part of their wider business approach to creating a fairer society and more sustainable future.

Employee volunteering is a key mechanism to deliver value to communities. It can enable the sharing of skills and insights between different members of communities, and is an important way to help build the capacity of the charity sector to help organisations deliver their mission and operate sustainably.

In the UK, many businesses support some form of community initiative – including skills sharing through pro bono support, contributions in kind, matched giving for sponsored fundraising activities, local one-off volunteering events, fundraising for a Charity of the Year or 'Time Banks' of company time used for volunteering.

### The Business Case

It is widely recognised that employee volunteering provides a range of benefits for companies. In a recent report by Circle Research<sup>8</sup> the top three business benefits of employee volunteering among the business surveyed are employee engagement (40%), PR & Reputation (38%) and Team Building (21%). In addition, it supports recruitment of new employees, in particular younger people<sup>1</sup>.

For further information on the business case for employee volunteering, please see BITC's "*Employee Volunteering: The Business Case*".

### How to begin?

Your employee volunteering programme should be a key delivery mechanism for your business's community investment strategy. More information on developing a community investment strategy can be found in the "*How to develop a community strategy*" guide. Key to this approach are BITC's Five Key Principles of Community Investment, and these should be used to guide the development of both your strategy and your employee volunteering programme.

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<sup>1</sup> A 2014 PwC study found that more than half of recent college graduates are seeking a company that has corporate social responsibility values that align with their own, and 56 percent would consider leaving a company that didn't have the values they expected.



## The Five Principles

**Identify the social issues** that are most relevant to your business and most pressing to the communities you work with.

- What are the issues affecting employees, customers and suppliers?
- Are there areas of deprivation near where you operate/are located?
- Are there any groups negatively affected by your products and services?

Focusing your programme on an issue that is important to your business will support the development of a long terms sustainable strategy.

**Work in partnership** with your communities leveraging your combined expertise for mutual benefit.

- Find a partner that can help you deliver your objectives
- Set specific objectives for the partnership.
- Consult your legal team to draw up a memorandum of understanding to outline the agreement.

When managed well, these partnerships can ensure resources are invested in the areas of most need, encourage employee engagement, open up new markets and deliver against key responsible business targets.

For further information, please see BITC's *"How to develop good cross-sector partnerships"*.

**Plan and manage your activity** using the most appropriate resources to deliver against your targets.

- Find a partner that can help you deliver your objectives
- Develop specific objectives and targets
- Allocate appropriate resources

This will support your activity and help you measure your inputs, outputs and impact.

**Inspire and engage your employees, customers and suppliers** to support your activity and get involved.

- Find a partner that can help you deliver your objectives
- Secure senior support to champion the activity.
- Tell everyone through simple & clear messaging.
- Recognise & celebrate achievements

This will encourage more employees to participate in your activity and increase your impact within your business and the community.



To support you to engage employees and generate the greatest value for your business, it is beneficial to explore how your employee volunteering opportunities link to your learning and development strategy. For more information on this, please see BITC's *"How to link employee volunteering with learning and development"*.

**Measure and Evaluate** the difference that your activity has in the community and on your business.

- What will you measure?



- How will you capture the information?
- Make sure you catch qualitative (stories, quotes, testimonials) as well as quantitative data.

Looking at the impact of your programme on your organisation, employees and on the community groups will help to support your business case, and help you review the effectiveness of your activity.

### What sorts of activities should we offer to our employees?

What you want to achieve through employee volunteering, and what you want your employees to get out of their volunteering experience will determine the types of opportunities that you offer. These opportunities may involve groups of employees working together, or individuals able to fit volunteering into their own interests and time.

Types of activities include:

- Pro bono: individual employees or teams donate their professional skills to help a community organisation for a one-off or sustained project.
- Mentoring or coaching: individual employees are assigned mentees who they support to achieve a particular goal. For example, mentors can work in primary schools to help children with numeracy and literacy, or with homeless mentees who they support in gaining the skills and confidence to re-enter the workplace.
- Individuals are supported to make a longer-term commitment to community organisations for example by becoming a school governor.
- Community Conversations: an employee or team of employees arranging events to bring together local community organisations and business to talk, build knowledge and understanding, and share challenges
- Team Challenges: a team of employees carry out a physical or skills based activity for the benefit of a community organisation.
- Fundraising: employees galvanise their colleagues or customers to raise money for charity. This could be a charity adopted by the company or one of their own choosing

### Who should we involve in setting up the employee volunteering programme?

As employee volunteering is proven to help staff motivation and can develop professional skills it is important to involve your HR and Training colleagues from the start. Work with them to integrate volunteering through your company's people management, training and professional development plans.

Develop a policy which sets out how employee volunteering opportunities are to be delivered. Include details on whether employees are entitled to paid time off to volunteer, and how many days a year the company will support them to volunteer. Some companies choose to allow this time off allowance to be flexed at the line manager's discretion and allow for matched time to support an employee's own volunteering.



As 70 per cent of UK adults had volunteered (formally or informally) at least once in 2015-16<sup>2</sup>, you can guarantee that a large number of your colleagues are already doing something without your support. You need to recognise this commitment and support it in parallel to your corporate programme. The policy that you draw up should reflect this and use existing volunteers as champions.



How much time off should we give employees for volunteering?

This will differ from company to company but examples range from one to six days a year. Bear in mind that different activities will have different levels of commitment (i.e. mentoring in schools may require a couple of hours a week over a longer period). Being flexible and offering opportunities to volunteer in

smaller chunks of time over a longer period can be easier to manage and offer greater support to a charity partner.

What percentage of the workforce should we aim to get involved in employee volunteering?

This will depend on what you are aiming to achieve through your strategy and what opportunities you have for individuals to get involved. The average percentage of the workforce that volunteered in companies that completed Business in the Community's Corporate Responsibility Index in 2013 was 19%.

What else do we need to think about?

Make it fun! Volunteering should be presented as a 'fun' activity. There are clear business benefits and employees can learn valuable skills, but the programme will not work unless volunteers enjoy the experience. This is particularly important at the start of the programme and with team activities.

How will you capture your information?

It will be important to evaluate the outcomes of your volunteering activity. This, as a very basic should cover the hours and costs the time that your employees have invested into communities, and start to understand what has been achieved through your activity to support the community, and what insights and skills this has generated that may support your business. Many businesses use their time management systems to track their volunteering inputs, often by designating a specific time code, and support this with post-activity feedback surveys, with questions that align outputs and outcomes to their wider strategy. Others have created bespoke apps that they ask employees to complete this information. It will be important to ensure

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<sup>2</sup> Community Life Survey 2015-16



that any system is simple and cost-effective, and enables your employees to provide information and feedback easily.

## Safety first

Check your legal and insurance position. Your company insurance policy should cover employees when they are 'off-site' and you should ensure that appropriate health and safety advice has been provided for your volunteers. If you are working directly with community organisations to deliver the volunteering opportunities check whether they are insured. Individuals volunteering with children and vulnerable adults will need a Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check. Check with the organisation you are volunteering with to confirm whether DBS checks are required, and if they have a process in place to undertake them.

## Money matters

Decide what resources you can commit to the programme. Bear in mind that this will need to include not just the costs of staff time but also those related to the management, administration and communication of the programme. You may also want to consider any associated cash or in kind donations. At this stage, you should also consider whether specialist support is needed to broker or manage the activity on your behalf.

## Brokerage support

You may want to consider getting support from third party brokers to source volunteering opportunities and manage relations with community. Although it is important that you also develop your capacity to manage activity, brokers provide skilled and valuable support on the community side, freeing your time to focus on motivating employees and securing senior management support. Brokerage services vary considerably across the country and brokers often operate independently even when part of an umbrella organisation. Charges will vary and capacity will depend largely on the nature of the voluntary sector and priority community issues in that city or town. If you have offices in a rural location or small town, it is unlikely that there will be brokerage available. Brokers may specialise on specific issues such as education (Education Business Partnerships) or environment (Groundwork) or may be more generalist (BITC, Volunteer Centres, CSV). All should work with you to ensure your volunteering delivers a positive impact on key community issues. Most brokered activity is team-based, although there is increasing provision for individual volunteering and there are organisations that will set up bespoke activity that is tailored to fit with your training and development programmes (Dovenest, Impact Training and Development).

## KEEPING IT GOING

Tips for making your employee volunteering programme a real success include:

- Strengthen links to training and development. Map the skills developed through volunteering to your competency framework and business objectives.
- Integrate the programme into existing training for new starters, graduates and managers.





- Recognise and reward volunteers through presentations, 'volunteer of the year' awards ceremonies and even formal accreditation.
- Develop high profile case studies to highlight the success of volunteering projects and seek local and national press coverage.
- Provide access to a more diverse range of opportunities, giving volunteers a greater choice of activities and providing 'something for everyone'.
- Provide an online service giving employees instant access to volunteering opportunities.
- Develop downloadable packs and guidance for employees looking to volunteer under their own initiative.
- Build up mutually beneficial, longer term partnerships with community organisations for a more sustained impact.
- Establish strategic partnerships with national organisations engaged in brokering and promoting best practice in employee volunteering.
- Hold high profile annual events to act as the focus of your campaign.
- Continue to set challenging targets that reflect the quality and impact of the volunteering as well as the number of employees who are engaged.
- Regularly review progress against targets with senior colleagues and community champions and keep them engaged.
- Continually measure and monitor volunteering activity to constantly prove the benefits of the programme and publicly report the impact of the programme.
- Work with your supply chain to promote volunteering and community involvement in small and medium sized businesses.

