

Best Practice Setting Up an Employee Volunteer Program During COVID-19

Guide

While many organisations have paused their volunteer involvement – now is a great time to focus on planning projects that you often think about but never get to. If one of those tasks was to set up an employee volunteer program - this resource is for you.

Involving employee volunteers can be extremely beneficial for organisations and individuals.

While many Employee Volunteer programs have been paused due to COVID19 now is a great time to establish relationships, so you are ready to hit the ground running when restrictions are lifted:

Building meaningful employee volunteer programs is a two-sided task but for both corporates looking to set up a volunteer program and for volunteer-involving-organisations (VIOs) looking to host employee volunteers, considering the following principles will be beneficial:

- 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 per 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

While your employees may not be able to go out and volunteer presently, now is a perfect opportunity to survey them to see what causes they are passionate about or whether there are local VIOs who support goals identified in your corporate social responsibilities. Getting a few staff members to research organisations out there that you can support is an important first step to get your program started.

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. Remember that the VIO is probably adjusting to life under COVID19 too and roles may be reorganised.

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 its 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 its about building awareness of your vision, mission, and program suite you might consider whether 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 Employee volunteers? 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 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 during COVID19, 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,
- Do you have volunteers or clients who you feel are struggling with the lack of social contact during COVID19? Can EVs step up and support these groups with welfare check calls?
- Can you talk to your corporate partners about your existing programs/outcomes so they are ready to reengage when volunteering is available?
- Corporate volunteers may not be able to physically volunteer but you can still keep them engaged in what your VIO does for the community. Can you organise a volunteer and or client to speak virtually about your organisation or program?