

Corporate Shares Community Profits

A guide to engaging corporate volunteers

A new approach to volunteering

Nearly every not-for-profit organisation relies on volunteers. Some involve them on a project-by-project basis, others have ongoing programs with a stable group of volunteers, most have boards or committees of management. All spend time and energy recruiting and training new volunteers for a variety of projects or tasks.

The recent growth of corporate volunteer programs has opened up a new pool of willing recruits who are not only looking for ways to be meaningfully involved in their communities but are being actively encouraged to do so by their employers.

"Corporate community engagement programs work best when they meet community needs as well as delivering core business objectives."

**Jerry Marston, Community Investment Director, Whitbread plc, UK
and Chair of the Corporate Responsibility Group UK.**

Cool in an emergency

Like all emergency service groups, the Sale Country Fire Authority relies heavily on the efforts of volunteers. During one of Gippsland's worst fire seasons on record, 16 volunteers from Esso's Longford plant joined the fight. Each year Esso and Mobil award Volunteer Involvement Program (VIP) grants to organisations supported by their staff volunteers. As a recipient of a VIP grant, the Sale Country Fire Authority used their \$1000 towards purchase of equipment used to fight the fires.



Corporate social responsibility makes good business sense

In today's global business environment, the philosophy driving corporate social responsibility is based on the belief that the social, as well as the economic, wellbeing of society is fundamental to business competitiveness and ultimately, business success.

Companies throughout the world are increasingly embracing the ideal of corporate social responsibility. Such companies share the belief that business has a significant role to play in addressing global poverty, social inequity and environmental concerns. In partnership with government, not-for-profit and community organisations, these companies engage with their communities in order to build stronger, healthier societies.

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is a way in which businesses manage their social and environmental impact on the communities within which they operate. In addition, many companies are measuring and reporting their progress in this area.

For not-for-profit organisations, the way in which companies demonstrate their social and environmental responsibility is of vital interest. Many have been set up in direct response to the problems created by the business excesses of the past.

Many companies recognise that their success is dependent on a good relationship with stakeholders. Customers are increasingly sophisticated in the way they judge business performance including ethical, environmental and employment practices. Helping find solutions to community problems also ranks highly – providing financial support and management expertise to not-for-profit organisations, offering them the use of business premises and facilities, donating gifts in kind (including company products), and sharing company networks.

One of the most effective ways in which businesses engage with the community is through corporate volunteering.

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What is corporate volunteering?

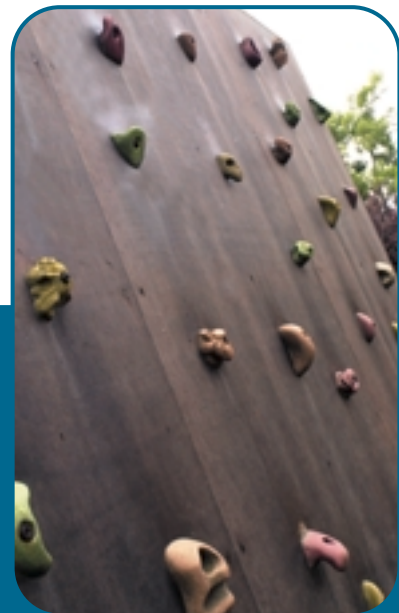
Corporate volunteering is one way in which businesses can fulfil their social responsibility. Companies that engage in corporate volunteering actively support and encourage their employees to volunteer within their local communities. Steadily growing in popularity since the 1990s, corporate volunteering involves the contribution of time, talent, energy, skills and resources by the company's workforce.

Tip

Make sure there are clearly defined, interesting and worthwhile jobs to be done. Volunteers not only want to know the aim of the activity, but want to be kept busy. Think about a short briefing before the activity starts to give people relevant and interesting information.

The sky's the limit

Engineers from a local construction company volunteered their skills to help design a climbing wall for a teenage drop-in centre. The engineers' contribution was invaluable in providing specialist skills the centre would not otherwise have access to or be able to afford. The result – the centre's recreation activities were greatly enhanced and the engineers had the satisfaction of seeing their design used and enjoyed.



Tapping into a new resource

Increasingly, businesses are setting up volunteer programs as part of their long-term corporate and human resource planning. To this end, businesses are pursuing partnerships with local organisations and identifying volunteering opportunities for employees.

There is now enormous potential for community organisations to work with these companies and enlist the help of motivated and skilled volunteers.

Many local businesses have the people and the infrastructure to provide support. Some also have corporate volunteering programs in place with enthusiastic individuals or teams of employees who want to become actively involved in the community.

Benefits of corporate volunteering

Corporate volunteering has many benefits for not-for-profit organisations, as well as for the community as a whole. These include:

- contributing new skills, knowledge and technical expertise
- forming teams of volunteers who can periodically perform major tasks
- creating wider community awareness of local issues and needs
- promoting the work of a not-for-profit organisation through associated publicity
- providing access to free or subsidised resources
- making a difference to the people and causes an organisation cares about
- improving understanding between the business and the voluntary sectors.

Tapping into a new resource

Tip

Corporate volunteering is a shared experience. While volunteers want to help, they also want to learn. Within any organisation there is an enormous amount of invaluable knowledge and skill that can be passed on to employee volunteers. Have some key facts relevant to the day's activity to pass on to the volunteers.



Ford volunteers in for the long haul

Faced with the challenge of repainting Camp Wilkins' Locket Lodge, two volunteer teams from Ford set up scaffolding, opened their paint tins, and got down to work. After two days, the facelift of the 36 year-old dormitory was complete. But at a place like Camp Wilkin, a not-for-profit holiday camp for school children and other charity groups, there's always work to be done. So it's reassuring that the volunteers from Ford have promised to continue their assistance with upcoming major projects.

Making the most of a willing workforce

Employees join their workplace volunteer programs for many reasons. Some simply want to help out in whatever way they can. Others have definite preferences for particular causes and types of volunteer work.

Many volunteers are happy to work for a specified time on a particular project (perhaps just for one or two days) while others prefer an ongoing commitment to an organisation.

Team activities are often favoured over individual activities as they provide volunteers with opportunities to work together in a sociable and productive way. First-time volunteers, in particular, may feel more comfortable in a group.

Types of volunteer activities

There are almost as many types of activities as there are volunteers. Think of indoor and outdoor activities, one-off and on-going, skilled and non-skilled, individual and team, during work hours and out of hours, whole day and part day tasks. Here are just a few examples:

- setting up a website
- writing human resources policy
- developing media and promotions strategy
- teaching basic administrative/computer skills
- conducting a market research survey at a local shopping centre
- distributing marketing brochures
- selling fundraising merchandise
- painting
- designing and printing a newsletter
- developing a funding bid
- staffing a call centre for a radiothon
- joining a committee.

Making the most of a willing workforce

Tip

Be prepared to offer a range of tasks so that the volunteers can find something that suits their interests, skills and available time.



Making science fiction a reality

The story of the Melbourne Science Fiction Club (MSFC) goes to show that there are virtually no limits on what corporate volunteers can do. The MSFC, a not-for-profit organisation which runs regular activities for people interested in fantasy, science fiction and related genres, is helped out on a regular basis by National Australia Bank staff in their free time.

In addition to providing crucial support to countless authors and artists, MSFC and NAB volunteers help stock and maintain the club's greatest asset – a unique library which houses thousands of genre books, including many rare and out-of-print items.

Planning a volunteer activity

Activities that have the best outcomes for the not-for-profit organisation are those that are well planned and carefully managed. They not only meet the company's human resources and business objectives but give employees the knowledge that they are making a valuable contribution.

One of the most important aspects of creating activities for corporate volunteers is to ensure that the activity is meaningful for the volunteers and useful for the not-for-profit organisation.

Before working with a team of employee volunteers, a not-for-profit organisation should ensure that it:

- is working with a company whose goals and beliefs are in alignment with its own
- has activities which are appropriate for corporate employee volunteers – try thinking outside the square and brainstorming ideas with paid staff and volunteers
- can allocate enough resources to the program to ensure volunteers have a positive volunteering experience – an organisation should be thinking of support staff, tools, training, information, etc.

Matching activities to volunteers

While there are many benefits to involving corporate volunteers, it's important to bear in mind that they will be constrained by their company's preferences for certain types of activities and levels of involvement. This means that organisations must find a balance between what they need and what a company and its volunteers can offer.

Planning a volunteer activity

In the process of identifying suitable corporate volunteering projects, it's worth taking the following points into consideration:

- offer team activities which can be carried out in a range of locations, for example, an activity that a group of volunteers can do remotely via the web
- schedule half-day activities for the morning so that volunteers don't get 'caught up' at work
- ensure there is enough work for the volunteers – don't adjust the number of volunteers needed because a company has extra people available as this can result in a lot of bored and unhappy volunteers

One in, all in

Staff from GE Consumer Finance's call centre found that the breakfast shift at the Brotherhood of St Laurence Coolibah Centre coincided with the slow time at the call centre. While a large number of the GE staff were keen to help out serving breakfast to homeless people, it was only necessary for a few people to be involved each day. Over the course of a few months all interested staff were rostered on breakfast duty. So, although all staff helped out in the same way, only 2 or 3 people were absent from the office at any one time.



Preparing for the volunteering day

Careful preparation ensures the volunteering day is as productive as possible – for both the organisation and the volunteers. It is worth taking the time to:

- check that all the tools and materials needed are available and in working order
- ensure the contact person at the company has all the information they need to inform their volunteers prior to the day
- let volunteers know what they need to bring or wear, what facilities are available for refreshments and lunch (they don't expect lunch to be provided but do like to know whether there is a canteen or they should bring their own), where and when they should meet, who they should contact if it's raining or there are last minute changes
- provide volunteers with information that will make the day more interesting, for example why certain trees are being planted on a tree planting day or how the funds raised on a fundraising activity will be used by the organisation
- make sure that all OH&S requirements are taken care of, for example who can provide first aid and where the first aid kit is kept
- provide the volunteers with a telephone number for the day in case they need to be contacted in an emergency - this way, they won't need to carry their mobile phones with them all day.

"The most successful programs are developed in close consultation and collaboration with the specific communities, projects and organisations." Jerry Marston, Community Investment Director, Whitbread plc, UK and Chair of the Corporate Responsibility Group UK.

Preparing for the volunteering day

Tip

Don't assume there will be a team available at short notice. It's important to plan the volunteer activity well in advance and keep in contact with the company's volunteer program coordinator. It can sometimes take time to find the right volunteer or team of volunteers for a specific project.



Swapping suits for work boots

As part of their annual *Day of Caring*, Melbourne's Esso and Mobil employees head off in teams to support charity organisations. One of the teams had their work cut out for them – digging in the gardens, working in the grounds, and fixing fences for the RSPCA. And by day's end, shifting a massive three tonnes of rubbish.

Supporting volunteers

While corporate volunteers will generally be very motivated and positive about being involved in the nominated project, they will need a certain amount of guidance and support, both before the activity and on the day:

- welcome the volunteers and give them some background information about your organisation
- outline the project, responsibilities and time required
- explain the tasks they will be involved in and provide training if required
- ensure volunteers know where to get a drink, something to eat and where the toilets are located
- introduce the member of staff who will supervise the activity
- if appropriate, provide a tour of the workplace
- distribute marketing materials, brochures or calendars of events for volunteers to take away
- thank the volunteers for their contribution.

Following up

Businesses whose employees have participated in volunteering appreciate feedback, particularly when it is positive! Feedback is essential for the monitoring and evaluation of corporate volunteering programs. It also helps to reinforce the many positive benefits of these programs. It is worth:

- sending photos from the day to the local newspaper, talking to a local radio station about the project (if you have permission to do so) and inserting an article in the organisation's newsletter
- providing feedback and formal thanks to the company – a letter to the team leader as well as one to the CEO copied to the team leader is a good idea
- taking time to talk with the regular volunteers and paid staff to find out how the day went – learn from this experience and use the information for the next team of corporate volunteers.



ANZ volunteers let off steam

The much loved century-old steam train, Puffing Billy, still runs on its original mountain track from Belgrave to Gembrook in the scenic Dandenong Ranges, 40 kilometres east of Melbourne. Now a major tourist attraction, Puffing Billy's operation depends on the dedication of hundreds of volunteers. This year ANZ staff joined their ranks and spent a

productive and rewarding day cleaning up the surrounding area. Motivated by seeing the huge difference their efforts made, the volunteers also enjoyed the benefits of participating in a valuable team-building exercise.

Tip

Keep in touch with the contact at the company before and after the volunteer activity. Employee volunteers like to know what is expected of them beforehand, and their employer needs to know their involvement was worthwhile and successful.

Who is Volunteering Australia?

Volunteering Australia is the national peak body working to advance volunteering in the Australian community.

Volunteering Australia was established in 1993 to promote the economic, social and cultural value of volunteering. Volunteering Australia serves the interests of almost five million Australians who volunteer and the 700,000 not-for-profit organisations which involve them. It develops tools and resources for both the volunteers and the organisations to ensure that volunteering is a viable and ongoing activity in Australia.

Volunteering Australia is an International Leadership Group partner for the ENGAGE campaign in Australia. ENGAGE is a global initiative of the International Business Leaders Forum (IBLF) in partnership with Business in the Community (BITC) and a coalition of international non-governmental organisations. ENGAGE is a three-year strategy which aims to increase business involvement in the community.

Becoming the Guide Dogs' best friend

One of the hidden benefits of corporate volunteering is the opportunity it offers for people from different levels or departments of an organisation to work together. This is exactly what happened when a group of 15 from Esso and Mobil donated their services to help exercise some appealing and highly intelligent guide dogs, help clean up their kennels, and generally help out around the place. Representing every level of staff, including directors, admin assistants and IT specialists, the volunteers forged new and valuable friendships they'll take back to their workplace.



How can Volunteering Australia help?

Volunteering Australia and its network of volunteer centres are experienced brokers between companies and not-for-profit organisations, with a proven track record in identifying opportunities and matching individual and team volunteers to the most appropriate projects.

Volunteering Australia's website, *govolunteer.com.au*, is designed to make the job of finding volunteers as easy as possible. It not only has an area where not-for-profit and community organisations can advertise their volunteer positions, but offers suggestions for skill-based projects, fundraising activities, special events or manual activities that community organisations may like to consider. There are also lots of good tips for making volunteer opportunities attractive to as wide a range of people as possible.

Tip

When advertising on *govolunteer.com.au*, remember to include the word 'team' in position descriptions that may be appropriate for a team of corporate volunteers. This will ensure that businesses searching the website for team opportunities will find them.

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Acknowledgments

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