volunteers CONNECTING community

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Volunteer calgary
the value of one... the power of many.

Create meaningful opportunities for all volunteers

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Overview

Change the way your organization views volunteers and reap the rewards.

Tales of opportunity

The non-profit sector is full of exciting 'tales of opportunity', stories found on websites and in newsletters from industry leaders across the sector and around the world. Headline after headline speaks about the 'new volunteer', the growing trends of 'employee volunteering' and the growth of 'episodic volunteering'. These tales promise a wealth of volunteers eager to find meaningful opportunities within the non-profit sector.

Add to that the countless workshops and specialized training courses available in most volunteer centres and across the internet offering guidance for volunteer managers to learn how to manage these trends in volunteerism. The opportunities appear to be endless, but where does one start in order to understand how these trends impact the non-profit organization and what can be done to respond to them?

The common thread through many of these 'tales of opportunity' is simple — if an organization is unable to respond to these volunteer trends it runs the risk of being left behind. This could mean organizations potentially facing real challenges in achieving both short and long-term goals.

Recently, Volunteer Calgary sat down with industry expert Betty Stallings to discuss some of these trends and the ways in which non-profit organizations could start to implement changes that would enable them to incorporate these trends.

It became clear that the resounding message found in these volunteering trends is the need for organizations to change their perception of volunteers. Rather than thinking of volunteer programs in isolation and volunteers as 'outsiders', consider the direct and positive impact that volunteers could have on achieving the organization's mission.

At the heart of this process is the development of a value statement that clearly states that the organization sees volunteers as partners helping to achieve the organization's mission. The Canadian Code for Volunteer

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Tales of opportunity

Continued from front page

Involvement outlines several value statements that confirm the importance of volunteers in our society. These examples can serve as excellent starting points from which your organization can craft its own value statement. Your value statement does not need to be complex, the example below is simple and direct:

Rather than thinking of volunteer programs in isolation and volunteers as 'outsiders', consider the direct and positive impact that volunteers could have on achieving the organization's mission.

"We believe that volunteers are a valuable human resource and play an important role in striving to meet the mission of our organization."

Does this statement reflect the way your organization sees volunteers? Does everyone in the organization share this view or at least acknowledge its importance, from the receptionist to the CEO? If not, how do you change that?

The value statement is not meant to reside exclusively with the Volunteer Manager, it needs to be shared throughout the organization. So dust yours off, pull it out of the filing cabinet, and encourage all levels of staff and volunteers across your organization to bear this in mind as they proactively find opportunities to apply it to day-to-day tasks. It would be even better if you could include everyone in developing or tweaking your value statement.

Once a value statement has been created, strengthen it with a list of supporting proof points that demonstrate how that partnership exists within the organization. Do not panic if your list of proof points is small, as the organization continues to move towards universally embracing this statement that list will grow. To begin with, create this list to serve as a starting point to establish current practices which you can use as a way to identify additional opportunities.

"We believe that volunteers are a valuable human resource and play an important role in striving to meet the mission of our organization."

Next, in order to better understand how your organization is working in partnership with volunteers, do a quick HR audit to identify where volunteers are within your organization and take a look at areas that are currently not utilizing volunteers. Talk to the department heads and try to identify opportunities in areas where a volunteer, possibly one with a specific skill set, could be able to make a positive impact. Volunteer Canada provides a number of downloadable resources at http://volunteer.ca/en/volcan/vol-management to assist you with this process. This simple evaluation will help identify the potential areas for highly skilled volunteers or even employee volunteer groups to better work in partnership with your organization.

Although this change will not happen overnight, we can all agree that every journey starts with the first step, and it is that step which will create the foundation for more development. Hopefully, these simple steps will provide a solid base for your organization to move forward, building its capacity to effectively engage more volunteers as it strives to achieve its mission and vision for the community.

How to start changing minds

If your organization is eager to embrace this positive change, a few simple steps may be just what are needed to reignite the entire team and move your organization toward its very own tale of opportunity realized. Here is a sample of a value statement and its supporting proof points to help get you started:

At <your organization's name>, we believe that volunteers are a valuable human resource and play an important role in striving to meet the mission of our organization.

We commit to our volunteers by:

- Offering a volunteer program that has adequate resources, is well managed and has the appropriate infrastructure to ensure volunteers are working in a supportive environment
- Ensuring every volunteer receives a thorough orientation and training and that at this training, the mission of the organization is clearly communicated
- Providing the necessary supervision and accessible support so that you can fulfill your commitment to the organization
- Informing you of all new programs, services and changes to policy that impact the services offered to our clients
- Providing you with a detailed, current volunteer position description that not only clearly outlines your volunteer role but also how you will give and receive feedback
- Creating an environment where there is open communication, a sense of teamwork and respect for diversity between volunteers and staff
- Providing ongoing opportunities to learn and grow which includes the opportunity to experience various positions while you are volunteering with our organization
- Recognizing you for your contributions and accomplishments in both formal and informal ways

As a volunteer at <your organization>, you act as an ambassador of our organization.

Because of this important role, we expect volunteers to:

- Participate in orientation, training and ongoing development opportunities
- Work within the boundaries of your volunteer position description while supporting the vision, mission and policies outlined by our organization
- Act as an ambassador of <organization> by taking ownership for actions and decisions made while volunteering
- Approach your volunteer assignment as a professional commitment
- Engage in discussions with staff in order to express your comments, suggestions, or concerns
- Promote a team spirit by respecting differences in people, valuing diversity of opinion and working with others to achieve the goals of our organization

- Value the importance of providing exceptional quality service to our clients that is second-to-none by being friendly, informed and respectful

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Volunteers Connecting Community

A quarterly publication of Volunteer Calgary

Volunteer Calgary's mission is to engage more people, more effectively, to volunteer in the community. In keeping with our goal, this newsletter serves as an information tool for the many individuals and organizations active within our community's voluntary sector.

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Partnering with Corporate Calgary to make a difference

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has been a buzz word around the boardroom table for several years now. In response to the increased interest from consumers and the various key publics, corporations everywhere have stepped up to put in place some form of internal community minded program to address this issue.

CSR comes in a variety of shapes, sizes and colours : corporate responsibility, corporate accountability, corporate ethics, corporate citizenship, sustainability, stewardship, triple bottom line and responsible business are a few of the most common references used in the corporate world. Although the name varies, the implications for the non-profit sector remain the same; this is a huge opportunity not only for corporate giving but also for employer-supported volunteerism!

Nowhere is this more evident than right here in Calgary, where our economy seems to have sprung up almost overnight bringing with it a surge of growth and placing incredible pressure on the social services infrastructure that is at the heart of our community.

A chance conversation between a staff representative and the president of a security and mechanical systems company was the start of a long-term partnership between Hull Child and Family Services and Convergint Technologies. Hull had a need to increase the level of safety and security for its residents, while Convergint Technologies was looking for a meaningful way to involve their employees in a "Social Responsibility Day". It was a perfect match!

The Convergint Team volunteers together at Hull.

Together, they developed a plan for installing security systems throughout the facility. The staff at Hull provided the information on what the program needed and the team at Convergint identified the areas where they could lend their expertise manpower and equipment. In addition, Hull identified some landscaping and beautification projects that were sorely in need of attention and the staff at Convergint added this project to their list to provide a hands-on project for their non-technical staff to get involved with.

That was four years ago. Since then, Convergint has continuously provided support and has immersed themselves in a variety of activities in support of Hull such as providing Christmas hampers for families, the annual Stampede breakfast, and an annual fundraising golf tournament.

The partnership has developed to such a point that Lou Zaganelli, Director of Resource Development at Hull, says, "Our maintenance department enthusiastically anticipated each year's project and works directly with Convergint in identifying and selecting the annual priorities and is very closely involved in setting up the projects and providing assistance and support on the Social Responsibility Day."

The partnership between the two serves as an excellent example of how a simple match between the needs of the non-profit organization and the needs of its corporate counterpart combined with collaborative planning can lead to a successful, mutually beneficial employee volunteer program.

Understanding why companies volunteer

Recently, Volunteer Calgary had the opportunity to partner with the Boston College Carroll School of Management, one of the leading educational institutes that offer training in this area, to offer Corporate Calgary the unique opportunity to participate in a 2-day training session on Corporate Citizenship. We were thrilled to participate in this knowledge transfer and to be able to sit in on these sessions and learn about the corporate world's expectations when working with non-profit organizations.

Ron Brown of Boston College Center for Corporate Citizenship chats with leaders of corporate Calgary.

If non-profit organizations are to become more active partners with the corporate sector and see long-term benefits from these partnerships, they need to understand that their corporate partners have slightly different goals. Driving the majority of corporate community programs is the need for companies to see benefits: firstly, to the company, secondly, to the employees, and finally to the community. If non-profit organizations are to become more active partners with the corporate sector and see long-term benefits from these partnerships, they need to work together to find value and impact for both partners.

What can employee volunteers offer?

The skills of employees and the resources of companies can help to support your non-profit organization and the greater community in many ways.

- Supply the financial, technical or human resources to complete a project. Organizations often have great ideas but may lack the resources or the manpower to carry them out.
- Supply a non-profit organization with highly motivated, talented and qualified volunteers. Employees bring many new and valuable skills and expertise to organizations.
- Enhance services for the community. There is an opportunity to utilize specialized skills of employee volunteers to create better processes and services for the benefit of the community.
- Raise awareness of your non-profits organization's mission, particularly in the business sector. Involving employee volunteers increases and expands public awareness of your organization.
- Provide a fresh perspective. Employee volunteers who share the same vision as the organization may offer innovative ideas for working toward the same goals.
- Foster relationships within the business sector. This may lead to long-term relationships and further assistance such as gifts in kind, sponsorship, donations, etc.
- Help sustain community programs. With various forms of support from the business sector, community programs may have a better chance at success.
- Build a harmonious community. People from different backgrounds and cultures working together will foster a generally healthy community.

In order for our community to continue to be robust, it is imperative that non-profit organizations work with the corporate sector to move them beyond words on a page to effective actions that will have a positive impact on our community.

What companies need

The Center for Corporate Citizenship of Carroll School of Management at Boston College identified three key characteristics of a successful Employee Volunteer program.

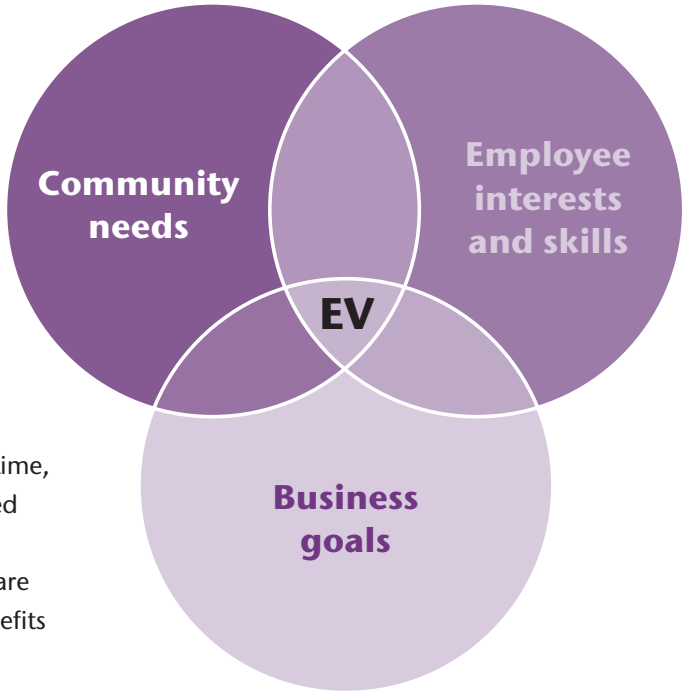
1. Addressing community needs.

2. Reflecting employee interests and skills.

3. Meeting business goals.

It is important to bear in mind that a successful Employee Volunteer Program is not only about meeting a non-profit organization's needs but also, to some extent, addressing the company's needs, which are fulfilling business goals and employee interests.

Key Characteristics of a Successful Employee Volunteer Program



More employers are beginning to see the benefits of sending employees to volunteer in the community to donate skills and time, in addition to resources. Modern businesses need a highly skilled and motivated workforce that integrate teamwork, leadership, organization, interpersonal and other transferable skills. These are vital skills amply provided by many volunteer projects, real benefits that a non-profit organization can offer the corporate sector.

If your non-profit organization is looking to take advantage of this growing trend, you need to be aware of the benefits companies are looking to get from their employee volunteer program.

- **A way to strengthen teamwork.**

  Working together for a cause that is non-work related is a good way to strengthen employee ties with one another.

- **Enhance the sense of community in the workplace.**

  Employees who are empowered to contribute to the issues they care about are able to work together more effectively with fewer issues.

- **Strengthen employee skills, including leadership and project management, and discover unutilized employee skills.**

  Employee Volunteering can add a new dimension of learning to existing training programs with the real-life scenarios which can stimulate creative thinking and problem solving.

- **Build corporate image in the community.**

  Employee volunteers are in effect company ambassadors and can enhance the reputation of their company in the community.

- **Boost employee morale and increase retention.**

  Employees take great pride and satisfaction in what they achieve through their volunteer work. Community involvement offers a whole range of value added benefits for employees. When employees feel good about their employer, they are more likely to prove their loyalty in the long run.

Corporate and community, hand-in-hand

A number of non-profit organizations in Calgary have already recognized huge opportunities to utilize employee volunteers.

For Brown Bagging for Calgary's Kids, the support of teams of volunteers is vital to their ability to complete their organization's mission to provide youth with the essential nutrients to allow them the ability to learn. Everyday, Brown Bagging works with different employee groups in order to deliver nutritious packed meals to more than 40 schools in Calgary.

"We need a lot of hands and employee groups can offer this to us," says Christy Fisher, Community Outreach Coordinator of Brown Bagging for Calgary's Kids.

On a daily basis, they work with volunteer groups consisting of 10 to 30 people who perform a variety of tasks from making sandwiches, bagging lunches, to packing bins bound for schools. The group works together to prepare over 1,000 lunch bags everyday.

Carewest George Boyack, a public care provider, is another organization that works with employee volunteers. With 9 sites that offer long-term care, rehabilitation and recovery services, they need all the extra hands they can get to keep residents comfortable, happy and well-entertained.

Nursing care at the facilities requires only approximately 3 hours each day so finding a meaningful way to keep residents active and fulfilled for the rest of the day is a critical need. For this reason, Carewest hosts events and recreational activities regularly throughout the day.

"My hope is that employee volunteers may be able to fit into the gap of weekday, daytime volunteers," says Debby Clegg, Carewest Volunteer Resources Coordinator. True enough, the ability to do volunteer work within a weekday is a qualification that is quite unique to employee volunteers.

There are several factors that attract employee volunteers to an organization aside from the cause itself, such as logistics and time requirement. In most cases, flexibility and openness to working in cooperation with the employee volunteer group is critical.

In the corporate world where time is money, it is important to be considerate of peoples' schedules. "Being a small organization we can be flexible to the needs of the group," says Fisher. "We welcome "one-timers", although once people come once they usually want to come back."

The location and the size of the venue are two major considerations.

"Being downtown makes us accessible to many companies," says Fisher. This makes recruiting volunteers a much easier task. Ample space to work in is also a must for food preparation.

Having a variety of activities to choose from keeps employee groups interested in volunteering with an organization.

"We are able to be flexible and look at various ways to accommodate employee needs," says Clegg. At Carewest, employee groups ranging from 10-20 people have stepped in to assist with activities: from birthday parties to decorating for the Stampede to gardening preparations.

It is not a difficult task to keep employee volunteers engaged. Most volunteers with Carewest find that the opportunity to provide assistance and interact with the residents is enough gratification.

As for Brown Bagging, many corporate groups volunteer because it makes for an excellent setting for a teambuilding activity. Plus, making lunches lends employees a tangible sense of doing something good for the community.

According to Fisher, "We believe that if they can start to feel that they are part of what we do, they will be motivated to continue with us. It's all in the relationships."

If you think employee volunteers might be able to help your organization achieve its goals, consider the ideas and tools brought forth here to help you build a meaningful employee volunteer program.

The corporate sector is constantly looking for opportunities to enhance their internal volunteer programs , so reach out and forge your relationships with the corporate sector – it will pay off in the long run.

Looking for more resources?

Whether it is called workplace, corporate or employee volunteering, companies and organizations are increasingly looking at active participation in their community, as well as in providing financial contributions. The recently released report by Imagine Canada entitled **Corporate Community Investment Practices, Motivations & Challenges: Findings from the Canada Survey of Business Contributions to Community**, describes that most large corporations (82%) support some kind of employee volunteer activity. For example they allow employees to adjust their work schedules to volunteer (79%) or take time off with pay (72%), and/or organize company-sponsored volunteering events (72%). They also support fundraising initiatives by raising money from employees (reported by 83%), payroll deduction programs for employee giving (71%), providing matching grants for employee contributions (62%), and raising money from customers or suppliers (50%).

(Note: this report has just been ordered for the Volunteer Calgary Library and will be available for borrowing shortly.)

Other selected titles on this topic include the following:

Business support for employee volunteers in Canada: results of a national survey. 2006
Most charitable and nonprofit organizations in Canada rely on volunteers to help them fulfill their missions. Many organizations, however, report difficulties finding and retaining suitable volunteers. Business support for employee volunteering can, therefore, have a positive impact on the capacity of nonprofit organizations to fulfill their missions and achieve their goals.

Corporate volunteer programs : maximizing employee motivation and minimizing barriers to program participation. 2006
This report is intended to provide guidance to companies that wish to motivate employees to participate in a corporate volunteer program. It offers recommendations based on a detailed study of one of the largest corporate volunteer programs in Canada – the corporate volunteer program run by the Ford Motor Company of Canada – and on interviews with over 100 Ford employees. Revised and updated from 2004 edition.

Developing employer-supported volunteerism policies. 2003
The business sector has recognized the importance of investing in the well-being and quality of life of the communities it serves. Companies are making this social investment through their relationships with local, national, and global stakeholders, and through business decision-making that is tied to ethical and legal compliance, respect for people, communities and the environment. The management of these relationships is known as Corporate Social Responsibility, or CSR, and it has become an integral component of contemporary business models. One element of CSR that has gained momentum is employer-supported volunteerism (ESV). Companies supporting this growing form of volunteerism have discovered a key entry point to direct community involvement.

Get started today!

To help get you started utilizing employee volunteers, consider typical activities for employee groups. Usually, they are outdoors with plenty of working space and promote teamwork within a group.

Community Events

- participate in a sports day with a youth centre
- host a fundraising event
- set-up or clean-up at a community event

Service

- deliver meals
- help at a food bank
- participate in youth, disabled, or seniors programs
- sort donations, toys or clothes

Construction

- install an accessibility ramp
- build a deck or patio
- work on interior or exterior framing
- dry walling
- paint
- garden
- clean up a park or waterfront