



Employee Volunteering:

A GUIDE FOR SMALL TO MEDIUM SIZED ENTERPRISES



Funded by the Prime Minister's Community Business Partnership

What is *Employee Volunteering*?

Employee or corporate volunteering describes a new trend in volunteering, in which businesses support their employees to undertake volunteering work in the community.

Volunteering Australia defines volunteering as an activity that takes place through not-for-profit organisations for the benefit of the community. The volunteer undertakes the activity of their own free will and for no financial payment.

The term 'employee volunteering' recognises that it's not just large companies which undertake this kind of activity. It can describe any volunteering activity which is supported through a business. It can be related to the employee's professional skills or unrelated to their skills.

Employee volunteering is any unpaid work, facilitated, encouraged or supported by the business, which helps a not-for-profit organisation.

This is a guide for small to medium sized enterprises (SMEs) who are interested in helping the community through volunteering. Included in the accompanying CD is a range of templates, tools and checklists which will help you develop a successful employee volunteering program. These are identified throughout the guide with a  symbol.

Larger companies especially are investing in corporate social responsibility (or CSR) programs in response to the public's expectations of them to act in socially responsible ways. Volunteering Australia's survey¹ of companies with volunteering programs in Australia found that the average level of investment in their volunteering programs was \$20,000 per year, excluding the value of the time given by the staff who volunteer.

At the same time, not-for-profit organisations are evolving their capacity to take on corporate volunteers and becoming savvy about how to yield the most benefits from the activity. These include:

- Having access to resources and skills they wouldn't otherwise have been able to afford.
- Gaining new perspectives on the way they go about things.
- Having new supporters involved in the organisation and an increased level of community awareness about their activities.
- The possibility of longer term support.

¹ Volunteering Australia, *Corporate Volunteering Survey*, Melbourne 2006

SMEs AND VOLUNTEERING

According to ABS statistics, a small business is defined as one which employs less than 20 people, and a medium business as one which employs between 20 and 199 people. Small to medium sized businesses make up 95% of all businesses in Australia.

You may be a sole trader, in partnership, or operate a micro business employing less than five people.

If you or your staff are offering your time and skills (be they professional or trade skills) to a not-for-profit organisation then you are making a volunteering contribution to the community.

Some smaller businesses may think that the CSR imperatives which drive corporate volunteering do not apply to them, but all businesses can benefit from operating in healthy and cohesive communities. Businesses have long been contributing their time to help the community in a variety of ways, long before the terms 'corporate volunteering' and 'corporate social responsibility' became buzzwords.

Smaller businesses have a lot to offer not-for-profit organisations, but the benefits flow both ways –

Matt Tibble and his business partner Tony dos Santos run their small business, Creative Junction – a design and marketing company. They have a client mix of small and medium sized businesses as well as not-for-profit organisations. As the business is still in its early stages, both Matt and Tony are keen to increase the awareness of the business and source new clients. Supporting not-for-profits through pro-bono work has helped provide tangible case studies and examples of their business skills. While helping out a charity is an important activity, 'the warm and fuzzy feeling only lasts for so long,' Matt says.

Smaller businesses face greater challenges accommodating staff absences but there are some ways around that. Staff could be encouraged and supported to:

- Participate in events which take place outside of normal working hours (for example, weekend fundraising events or tree-planting days).

- Consider computer-based volunteering projects, which can be undertaken at the volunteer's office or home.

- Be involved in social support programs in which staff can regularly call elderly or isolated people in the community for a friendly chat at the start of the day.

- Leave work early once a month to support their participation on a board of management, for example.

Why would businesses want to volunteer?

Volunteering strengthens and establishes relationships and networks, and according to a Sensis survey² of SMEs in Australia, 36% of SMEs are already volunteering their support. Their motivations are varied but they may be responding to requests for help, seeking increased exposure in the community (this is a very cost-effective form of publicity), wanting to demonstrate their commitment to their local community, or their motivation is coming from a dedication to a particular community cause.

David Grayson is the director of Business in the Community, an alliance of UK businesses committed to improving their positive impact on society. He is quoted in the article "Do-gooders accrue benefits, not losses"³.

"I talk about responsible business but I am not sure that's quite right because it puts the emphasis on obligation, and what I am trying to promote is opportunity,"

"The thing that most enthuses and excites business is solutions. It's about spotting new trends and being able to respond to them. It's about harnessing all that entrepreneurial can-do and tackling environmental and social issues."

² Sensis Business Index Sweeney Research – November 2006

³ Gettler, Leon, "Do-gooders accrue benefits, not losses," The Age, The Age Online 15/3/07 www.theage.com.au/news/business/

Carl is the owner of two mortgage brokerage businesses and employs five people. Carl is an active member of his community and, as his own boss, he has the flexibility to incorporate volunteering into his work time. While he is driven by a strong sense of compassion, the volunteering he undertakes through his work is underpinned by a business imperative. Through his interactions with people he has met at various community events and forums he was struck by the realisation that his business 'isn't as famous as you think it is'. He believes that engaging with the community through supporting not-for-profits is a good way to increase exposure and is better publicity than advertising in local newspapers. Can any small business afford not to be seen as supporting the local community?

Staff loyalty, retention and morale are all positively impacted when employers support and facilitate the community engagement of their employees⁴.

For example, many not-for-profit organisations look for additional support in the lead up to Christmas. Planning an end of year volunteering event is a popular way to build team camaraderie and encourage staff to give something back to the community. Employee volunteering programs can also assist those employees who are making the transition into retirement by exposing them to volunteering as a fulfilling post-work life activity.

ORIMA Research specialises in the business of market and social research. ORIMA offers pro bono services to not-for-profit organisations according to a predetermined spend each year and is looking to expand the volunteering program for its staff. Director Liz Duniec believes an employee volunteering program helps build staff loyalty to the firm and commitment to its values and culture. In addition, it is a practical demonstration of the company's commitment to corporate social responsibility. It is also in the long-term interests of all businesses, large or small, that the community has a positive view of them. There are other more immediate advantages as well – ORIMA's pro bono projects provide valuable learning and development opportunities for its staff, particularly junior staff.

'How could my business help?'

Not-for-profits may prefer partnering with smaller businesses, finding them more flexible and open to dialogue. Businesses can offer many skills to not-for-profits. For example, general business skills such as running meetings, basic budgeting, how to use software applications, and a range of trade skills could all be useful to not-for-profits. More complex skills could apply to database management, HR policy reviews, web development, project feasibility studies, reviewing systems, or writing business plans.

Identify what skills your staff could offer and whether they want to contribute in this way.
Talk with the not-for-profit to determine how these skills might translate in a not-for-profit context.

Remember it's not always necessary to be an expert in the project. The value of your contribution will probably lie in how you contribute to the process of achieving the project's outcomes.



B. Staff Survey Questions – use the sample questionnaire included in the CD to gauge staff interest in a volunteering program.

Business owners, and this is especially true in regional areas, may think that their employees are already well-connected in the community without any urging from them. But there is still a role for the business to support and recognise their good work.

Support for volunteering can also mean:

- Giving access to the use of office equipment or meeting room space to help them with their volunteering.
- Providing in kind support to volunteering projects (for example, a hardware store donating the paint needed for a building maintenance project).
- Allowing staff time to organise a team for a special fundraising event.

⁴ Volunteering Australia, *Staff Recruitment, Retention, Satisfaction and Productivity: The effects of employee volunteering programs*, Melbourne 2007

‘What sort of roles could we do?’

It can be a challenge to find volunteer roles which fit into short periods of time when often what is needed is a long term and regular commitment, especially if it involves working with clients. However, short term volunteers can sometimes be accommodated into regular volunteering programs.

Rotating teams going to serve meals in a soup kitchen, or participating in events are good examples of once-off opportunities as the training requirements are not high. Climate change is the cause of the moment. This could translate into tree-planting days or helping with fundraising events for drought relief. Here are some other ideas:

- Mechanics helping with vehicle maintenance for vehicles used for meal delivery services.

- Hairdressers helping to style models for a fashion parade to raise money for a not-for-profit organisation.

- Being a mentor to young disadvantaged people, new migrants to Australia or to the CEOs of the not-for-profit organisation itself.

- Florists donating floral arrangements for fundraising events.

PARTNERING WITH NOT-FOR-PROFITS

‘How do we know if a not-for-profit organisation is legitimate and reputable?’

A not-for-profit is defined as an organisation whose primary objective is for social rather than economic purposes. There are literally tens of thousands of not-for-profits in Australia. Some are large and complex, some rely entirely on charitable funds, some are entirely volunteer run.

To determine if an organisation is a registered not-for-profit you can check their status by searching their ABN on the Australian Business Registry.



E. *Selecting Not-For-Profit Partners* is a guide for the process of selecting suitable not-for-profit partners to volunteer with, and assessing if a not-for-profit can demonstrate ‘best practice’ volunteer management.

Where to begin

As a starting point consider what it is you are trying to achieve – is your aim to address a particular social issue or is it to support the work of an organisation in general?

Consider the relative merits of working with smaller or larger not-for-profits. By supporting smaller organisations you are probably giving to those who need it most. On the other hand larger groups will usually have greater capacity to work with business partners.



A. *Step by Step Guide* outlines the steps involved in setting up and running a volunteering program for your staff.

ENSURING BEST OUTCOMES

Long term versus short term involvement

Like nurturing your own customer base to encourage repeat business, it could be argued that there is more value in a sustained and ongoing relationship with a not-for-profit organisation. This could be achieved simply through a yearly volunteering involvement (an annual fundraising ball, for example) when a large number of volunteers is needed. Knowing that they can go to you for a team of volunteers each year saves the not-for-profit valuable time.

However, there is nothing wrong with short term partnerships. The point is that both parties agree that it’s mutually beneficial. It also gives the business the opportunity to test out the not-for-profit before considering a longer term association and indeed, gives staff the opportunity to try out volunteering.

Ongoing volunteer partnerships, even if once or twice a year, are supported by the following factors:

- The business has a policy regarding its volunteering program. _____
- Knowledge about and responsibility for the program is spread amongst several employees. _____
- There is open dialogue between the parties, ensuring that each partner understands the changing needs of the other. _____
- There is recognition of what has been achieved so far. _____

Measuring the success of the partnership

While most businesses are not in it for the recognition there is the expectation that their work will make a difference.

What were the original goals in terms of the business' own objectives and the not-for-profit's objectives? If both parties understand from the outset what each is trying to achieve it is more likely to result in a successful outcome.

Consider the intangibles which would indicate a successful project:

- Happier staff and an enhanced sense of connection with the local community. _____
- Greater community awareness of the business. _____
- New networks being established. _____
- The enhanced skills of staff. _____

Ask your not-for-profit partner to produce some statistics and information for you after the completion of the volunteer activity such as:

- The dollars saved as a result of the volunteering activity. _____
- The number of clients helped. _____
- The level and range of skills transferred to the not-for-profit. _____
- Client and staff feedback. _____

The business owner, the staff who volunteer and the not-for-profit organisation are the three main parties whose feedback will be relevant to a formal debriefing. This information can help you if you want to quantify your contribution and is useful if you want to promote your efforts to a broader community.



D. Setting Targets – use this worksheet to help you clarify your objectives in terms of business and employee related goals, and community impact.



H. Measuring and Evaluation – these tools can help you measure and evaluate the effectiveness of your program.

BEST PRACTICE TIPS

Here are some tips for setting up a best practice employee volunteering program. Use the templates, tools and checklists in the accompanying CD to help you implement each best practice suggestion.

1. Formalise your intentions in a policy to give the program continuity and consistency. It will also help communicate the program to staff. The policy should outline the business case, the procedures involved, and define your objectives.



C. Employee Volunteering Policy

2. Research the not-for-profit – what they do, who they serve, what need in the community they address. It is a mistake to assume that you know what they need or that they will want what you are offering them. Begin by asking them what their priorities are.



E. Selecting Not-For-Profit Partners

- Engage the interests of staff. Encourage staff to participate by surveying them to gauge their interest in volunteering and their preferred causes. Remember that volunteering should always be a matter of choice.



B. Staff Survey Questions

- Think about what it is you want to achieve from the partnership. New customers? Networking opportunities? Giving your staff more experience relative to their role? More exposure in your community? Communicate with the not-for-profit about what you are hoping to achieve.



D. Setting Targets

- Negotiate timelines and outputs from the outset so you can manage the workload and ensure it doesn't clash with other work priorities.
- Manage the expectations of your staff about the capacity and resources of not-for-profit organisations. Remember not-for-profits are typically resource limited – a lack of time as well as financial resources may prohibit them from achieving things. It's important to manage the expectations of your staff about the capacity and resources of not-for-profit organisations. This can mean that a not-for-profit may have trouble following up with you, or have to decline your offer to help because they don't have the resources to manage the project effectively.
- If you are involved in a complex volunteering assignment such as installing a new IT system, take care not to abandon the project too early. That is, before transferring to staff in the not-for-profit organisation the knowledge it needs to manage or maintain the new system.
- Agree to extend your workers' compensation to your staff while they volunteer. Make sure the not-for-profit also has public liability and personal accident insurance, and that they follow good OH&S procedures to protect your staff while they volunteer.



F. Risk Analysis Checklist



G. Letter of Agreement Template

- Consider a small financial or in-kind contribution to help the volunteering project.
 - Acknowledge the efforts of all of your staff who volunteer, either through the program or in their own time. Hold a BBQ or afternoon tea in their honour during National Volunteer Week. Help them fundraise for their preferred organisation, or offer in-kind support to the not-for-profit organisation they volunteer with.
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What's in the CD Rom

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|---------------------------------|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| A. Step by Step Guide | D. Setting Targets | G. Letter of Agreement Template |
| B. Staff Survey Questions | E. Selecting Not-for-Profit Partners | H. Measuring and Evaluation |
| C. Employee Volunteering Policy | F. Risk Analysis Checklist | |

More resources available

The following resources have been produced by Volunteering Australia and are available free of charge on our website www.volunteeringaustralia.org

Corporate Volunteering Survey, Melbourne 2006

Corporate Shares Community Profits: A guide to engaging corporate volunteers, Melbourne 2003

Employee Volunteering and CSR: Job seeker perspectives, Melbourne 2007

Insurance and Risk Management for Corporate Volunteers, Melbourne 2006

Staff Recruitment, Retention, Satisfaction and Productivity: The effects of employee volunteering programs, Melbourne 2007

Two Way Street: Corporate volunteering in the not-for-profit sector, Melbourne 2001

Other resources

The Practical Partnering Toolkit available on www.socialcompass.com

Media Team Australia Online Tools available on www.mediateam.com.au

Volunteering Australia is the peak national body working to advance volunteering in the Australian community. Volunteering Australia acknowledges the support of the Prime Minister's Community Business Partnership and each of the state volunteering centres in producing this resource. For more information on employee volunteering or how to locate the volunteering centre in your state or territory please visit our website www.volunteeringaustralia.org

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