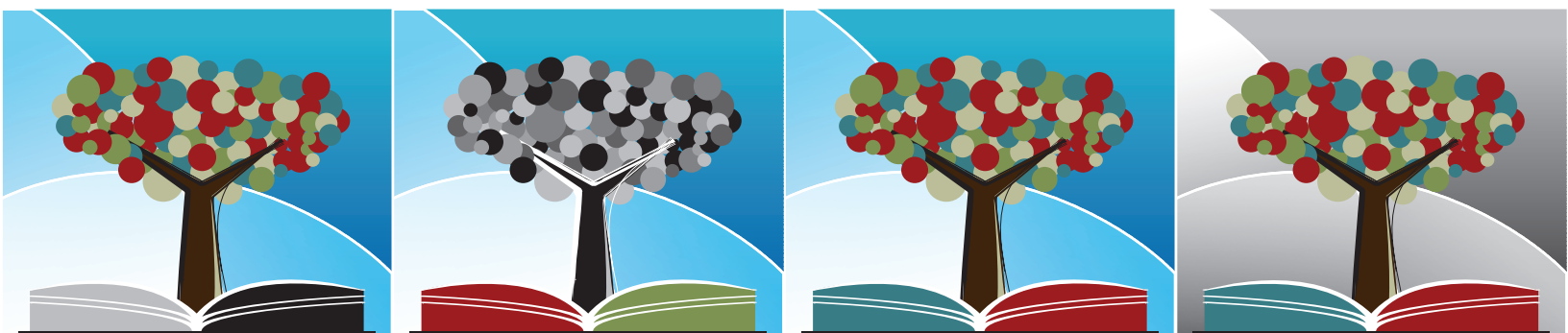


K N O W L E D G E D E V E L O P M E N T C E N T R E



Business Support for Employee Volunteers in Canada

Results of a National Survey

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Business Support for Employee Volunteers in Canada: Results of a National Survey

Executive summary

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. To understand the extent and nature of business support for employee volunteering, Imagine Canada and the University of Lethbridge commissioned a national survey in the fall of 2005. The survey asked representatives of 990 randomly selected businesses if they support employee volunteering, how they provide this support, and what they perceive to be the benefits and challenges of doing so.

The survey found that most businesses operating in Canada (71%) either encourage or accommodate employee volunteer activities during working hours and/or encourage employees to volunteer on their own time. However, the ways in which companies support employee volunteering vary considerably. Half (49%) of all businesses encourage employees to volunteer on their own time and more than a third (35%) accommodate employee volunteer activities during regular working hours. However, just 18% encourage employee volunteering during regular working hours.

Company support for employee volunteer activities tends to be reactive rather than proactive. The most common forms of support are adjusting work schedules (78% of companies that support employee volunteering), providing time off without pay (71%), and allowing access to company facilities and equipment (70%). Only about one third of companies that support employee volunteering use more proactive strategies such as recognizing employee volunteers (35%), making information about volunteer opportunities available to employees (31%), or allowing time off *with* pay for volunteer activities (29%).

In addition to supporting employee volunteering, many companies also provide financial and in-kind support to nonprofit organizations. Many businesses link this support to their employees' volunteer activities. In fact, more than half (58%) of companies that provide financial or in-kind support to nonprofit organizations and causes said that they support organizations where their employees volunteer. The types of organizations and causes most likely to receive support through corporate volunteer initiatives are health (16%), social services (13%), and sports and recreation (12%).

Formal corporate volunteer programs supported by company resources are in the early stages of development in Canada. Only 14% of businesses that support employee volunteering have a corporate volunteer program that is supported by company resources. Most businesses (69%) with corporate volunteer programs do not track their employees' volunteer time and most (59%) do not evaluate their support for the programs. However, the majority (54%) of businesses with corporate volunteer programs have at least one paid staff member working in the program as part of their official paid job responsibilities and nearly two thirds (63%) of corporate volunteer programs are led by a member of the company's senior management team.

The survey results indicate that companies perceive both benefits and challenges in supporting employee volunteering. Companies that support employee volunteer activities believe that it improves their public image (33%), employee morale (21%), and relations with the surrounding community (17%). The most commonly reported challenge is covering workload. Nearly one quarter (23%) of companies that support employee volunteering said that this is a challenge for them. Of the 25% of companies that do not support employee volunteering, many (22%) have never considered it, although some (14%) think it is not their responsibility.

Generally, large businesses are more likely than small businesses to support employee volunteering. Large businesses also appear to be more strategic in their efforts to support employee volunteering. For example, they are more likely to target specific causes. The survey found few significant regional differences in the ways in which companies support employee volunteering. Businesses in all regions of the country tend to support employee volunteering by encouraging employees to volunteer on their own time rather than by encouraging them to do so during working hours.

Based on the results of our survey, we offer a number of recommendations for businesses, nonprofit organizations, and governments that are interested in improving the effectiveness of corporate volunteer initiatives in Canada. Businesses, for example, should develop written policies on employee volunteering; recognize the contributions of employee volunteers; and encourage, or at least try to accommodate, employee volunteering during working hours. Nonprofit organizations should collaborate with businesses to provide meaningful opportunities for employee volunteers and recognize the less obvious supports provided by businesses (e.g., adjustments to working hours or access to company facilities or equipment). Governments should support forums that promote and coordinate greater collaboration between businesses and nonprofit organizations and consider providing tax benefits for companies that support employee volunteering.

Introduction

Canada has one of the largest and most vibrant charitable and nonprofit sectors in the world (Hall, Barr, Easwaramoorthy, Sokolowski, & Salamon, 2005). Despite its significant role in Canadian life, the sector faces a number of challenges that may affect its future vitality. One major challenge is recruiting and retaining volunteers (Hall, de Wit, Lasby, McIver, Evers, Johnson, et al., 2005). Given this, corporate volunteer initiatives may be one way to help Canada's nonprofit organizations fulfill their missions.

This report presents the first comprehensive portrait of business support for employee volunteers in Canada.¹ It is based on a survey of 990 randomly selected businesses, supplemented with data from 22 in-depth interviews and two focus groups. The survey found that almost three quarters (71%) of businesses in Canada either encourage or accommodate employee volunteer activities during working hours and/or encourage employees to volunteer on their own time. However, very few businesses have formalized their support for employee volunteering. Only 14% of companies that support employee volunteering have a corporate volunteer program supported by company resources. Only 3% of companies have a written policy on employee volunteering.

Within the nonprofit sector, interest in corporate volunteerism is fuelled by the challenges organizations face in finding suitable volunteers in sufficient numbers to support their activities. Findings from the National Survey of Nonprofit and Voluntary Organizations (NSNVO) show that 54% of Canada's 161,000 charitable and nonprofit organizations rely solely on volunteers to fulfill their missions and that 57% of organizations have difficulty recruiting the types of volunteers they need (Hall et al., 2005). Within the business community, corporate volunteer programs are increasingly seen as an important component of corporate social responsibility initiatives.

Our primary goal in undertaking this research was to understand the nature and range of business support for employee volunteers in Canada. This report will be of interest to business owners and managers, staff and volunteers of nonprofit organizations, and government policy-makers. The information in this report will help business owners and managers understand the current state of corporate volunteering in Canada and make decisions that benefit their company, employees, and community. Staff and volunteers of nonprofit organizations can use the findings in this report to help them understand

¹ In this report, we use the terms business, company, and corporation interchangeably to refer to for-profit businesses. Volunteering was defined for survey respondents as unpaid work for a charity or nonprofit organization.

how corporate volunteer initiatives work and what companies view as the benefits and challenges of supporting employee volunteers. This report will help government policy-makers understand both the potential and limitations of corporate volunteer initiatives.

The report is divided into six sections. In the following section, we present a short review of the literature on employer-supported volunteering. Next, we describe the survey and survey respondents. We then present the survey results in four sections. First, we provide an overview of the key findings. We then look more closely at those businesses that use company resources to support a corporate volunteer program. Third, we explore the benefits and challenges that companies associate with employee volunteering. And, finally, we look at the impact of company size and region on support for employee volunteering. The survey results are presented along with relevant quotations from our interviews and focus groups. In the last section of the report, we summarize the main findings, discuss their implications, and provide recommendations for action.

Previous research on employee volunteering

In recent years, business support for employee volunteering appears to have grown in several countries, including Canada. In this section, we explore what previous studies tell us about why companies support employee volunteering; how companies, employees, and communities benefit from employee volunteering; and the nature and scope of corporate support for employee volunteering. This review is useful for understanding the logic behind our survey questions and the larger body of research to which this project contributes.

Several studies (e.g., Abratt & Sacks, 1988; Mahoney, 1996) have found that businesses feel pressure to demonstrate that they are socially responsible. Such feelings are not unfounded. For example, a recent GlobeScan survey found that 50% of Canadian consumers believe that there is a need for laws requiring companies to be socially responsible, even if this means higher prices or fewer jobs (GlobeScan Inc., 2004). In another GlobeScan survey, 40% of Canadians said that they had punished socially irresponsible companies in the year preceding the survey (GlobeScan Inc., 2005). Employee volunteering is emerging as a tool for companies to highlight their social responsibility and to build value in the communities in which they do business (Burnes & Gonyea, 2005). This may explain why, throughout North America, there appears to be an increase in the number of companies that support employee volunteering in some way (Davidson, 1994; Finney, 1997; Romano, 1994).

Companies also introduce corporate volunteer programs because they believe that they will benefit in other ways. Rostami and Hall (1996) found that Canadian companies believed that their support of employee volunteering would improve relations with the surrounding community, improve the people skills of their staff, and create higher levels of employee self-esteem. A number of other researchers have found that corporate volunteer programs can boost employee morale and productivity (Caudron, 1994; Davidson, 1994; Finney, 1997; Flynn, 1994; Geroy, Wright, & Jacoby, 2000; Lidstad, 1995; Miller, 1997; Peterson, 2004; Smith, 1994). Pancer, Baetz, and Rog (2002) found that businesses, employees, and the community all benefit from a well-run corporate volunteer program. Benefits for corporations include enhanced, closer, and more trusting working relationships; higher morale and greater job satisfaction; increased pride and positive feelings about the company; improved corporate image and reputation; enhanced corporate visibility in the community; and increased sales. Benefits for communities include enhanced sense of community; improved environment; enhanced life for community members; increased financial and other aid to community organizations; and increased level of community volunteering.

Three surveys carried out over the past twenty years show that companies operating in Canada have encouraged and supported employee volunteering to varying degrees. In a Conference Board of Canada survey of 1,000 companies (Hart, 1986), most reported that their employees were involved in community-wide volunteer activities (e.g., United Way) or carried out specific activities (e.g., fundraising) for a particular cause. While evidence was strong that employees had initiated most of these activities, evidence was equally strong that employers encouraged and supported them. Most of the companies that participated in this survey had never actively matched employees with voluntary organizations or opportunities. Some, however, said that they would consider doing so in the future. Ten years later, a similar survey of 205 Canadian companies (Rostami & Hall, 1996) found that 65% of companies encouraged employees to volunteer on their own time but fewer than half accommodated volunteer activities during working hours. This study also found relatively little management support for employee volunteering in terms of either formal policies or the assignment of staff to manage employee volunteer activities. Instead, companies appeared to rely mainly on employees to assume the role of initiators and organizers. In a more recent but much smaller study, Hatton (2000) found that 32% of 25 companies surveyed produced a social responsibility or community involvement report, all of which featured a corporate volunteer program. The majority of these programs had been in existence for more than ten years and had participation rates ranging from 5% to 30%.

The results of the 2004 Canada Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating (CSGVP) suggest that employers can play a significant role in encouraging employee volunteering (Hall, Lasby, Gumulka, & Tryon, 2006). The survey found that more than half (57%) of employed volunteers received some form of non-monetary support for their volunteering from their employer. About one third said that their employer had allowed them to change or reduce their work schedule in order to volunteer (33%) or use work facilities or equipment for their volunteer activities (32%). Almost one quarter (23%) said that they had received some form of recognition for their volunteering and 21% said that they had received paid time off to volunteer. Those working in the fields of Finance, Insurance, Real Estate and Leasing (53%) and Public Administration (52%) were the most likely to report that their employer had a volunteer program or policy.

Estimates of the proportion of firms in the United States supporting employee volunteering range from 55% to over 80% (Brudney & Gazley, 2006). A survey of the 1,800 largest companies in the U.S. (Wild, 1993) revealed that more than half included

community service as part of the company's mission statement and one third used corporate volunteer programs as part of their strategy to address critical business issues. A recent study by the Points of Light Foundation (2002) found that the proportion of member organizations that incorporated volunteering into their overall business plans increased from 19% in 1991 to 78% in 1999.

Although numerous studies on corporate volunteer initiatives have been conducted in the U.S., most suffer substantial limitations in terms of conceptualization, measurement, and sampling.² As a result, the state of knowledge on employee volunteering is fragmented (Brudney & Gazley, 2006; Cihlar, 2004). In Canada, three surveys (Hart, 1986; Hatton, 2000; Rostami & Hall, 1996) provide baseline data on the extent and nature of corporate volunteering. There are also two recent case studies (Pancer, Baetz, & Rog, 2002; Rog, Pancer, & Baetz, 2004) that provide an in-depth look at the structure and benefits of one company's program. Finally, data from the 2004 CSGVP provide some evidence regarding the extent of employer-supported volunteering. However, these studies all differ in their concepts and methods and do not allow for any effective comparisons. Further, the most recent comprehensive survey of business support for employee volunteering (Rostami & Hall, 1996) was conducted ten years ago. Since that time, several initiatives to promote volunteering have been undertaken in Canada, including the International Year of Volunteers and the Canada Volunteerism Initiative. Efforts to promote good corporate citizenship have also increased. To date, however, there has been no major survey to gauge the effect of these changes on Canadian businesses. Hence, our current understanding of corporate support for employee volunteering is limited and warrants a thorough and systematic investigation.

In summary, previous research shows that businesses are increasingly aware of the benefits of employee volunteering and that many support it to varying degrees. There is, however, no recent survey that can inform us about the current status of company support for employee volunteering in Canada. To fill this information gap, we carried out a survey of 990 randomly selected businesses. The studies reviewed here assisted us in planning and designing this survey and developing the survey questionnaire.

² Most studies, for example, do not employ a nationally representative sample.

The survey

To determine the current state of corporate volunteer initiatives in Canada, Imagine Canada and the University of Lethbridge commissioned Pollara Inc. to survey a random sample of Canadian businesses. The survey was carried out between November 18 and December 12, 2005. In total, 990 interviews were completed. The response rate was 25%.³

The survey questionnaire was developed by the authors following an extensive review of the literature, an examination of instruments used in previous studies, and qualitative research that included four in-depth interviews and two focus groups.⁴ Fifteen pre-test interviews were conducted to fine-tune the survey. The final questionnaire contained 35 questions and took approximately 10 minutes to administer. Interviews were conducted by staff of Pollara Inc. in either English or French, depending on the preference of the respondent.

Respondents were selected using a list of businesses that was purchased from InfoCanada. This list comprised a random sample of 21,000 businesses. It included the company name, address, telephone number, and the number of full-time employees. Records were loaded into a Computer Aided Telephone Interviewing system, which randomly dialled the numbers for interviewers. The overall results of the survey are considered accurate within $\pm 4\%$, nineteen times out of twenty.⁵

Nonprofit organizations, government agencies, co-operatives, and for-profit businesses with only one employee were excluded from the sample.⁶ Interviews were conducted with the person responsible for coordinating their company's volunteer initiative. If this person was unavailable or the company did not have such a person, the person responsible for human resources was interviewed.

The survey sample was stratified by business size. The three strata were small businesses (fewer than 100 employees), medium-sized businesses (100 to 499 employees), and large businesses (500 or more employees). Each company's

³ Response rate is calculated by dividing co-operative contacts (i.e., disqualified, completed interview) by total eligible numbers (e.g., busy, answering machine, no answer, etc.).

⁴ The interviews were conducted with managers or administrators of employee volunteer initiatives. Focus group participants were employees of companies that had volunteer initiatives. Eighteen interviews were also conducted following the administration of the survey. The participants in these interviews had participated in an on-line survey of employees that was administered by the University of Lethbridge team in the spring of 2006. The quotations that appear in the following sections come from these 22 interviews and two focus groups.

⁵ The margin of error varies for subsets of the sample. The margin of error for small businesses is $\pm 4.1\%$. For medium-sized businesses, it is $\pm 6.9\%$. For large businesses, it is $\pm 4.0\%$. The margins of error by region are as follows: Atlantic Canada ± 7.2 ; Quebec ± 8.0 ; Ontario ± 4.7 ; Manitoba, Saskatchewan & Alberta ± 8.2 ; British Columbia ± 11.8 .

⁶ Respondents were asked to speak only about their establishment when answering questions. The Statistics Canada definition of a business establishment was used. Statistics Canada defines an establishment as the level of a business at which accounting data such as revenues, salaries, and wages are collected.

business size was determined using employee information provided by InfoCanada and information provided by respondents. Weighting procedures were used to ensure that the overall results are representative of the actual proportion of Canadian businesses.⁷

All major industries are represented in the survey sample (see Table 1).⁸ The largest representation is from Retail Trade (26%). The survey also covered all the major regions of Canada (see Table 2), with the largest representation from Ontario (45%).

Table 1. Distribution of sample by industry

Industry Classification	Percentage of total
Retail trade	26
Professional, scientific and technical services	9
Other	9
Manufacturing	8
Accommodation and food services	8
Construction	7
Wholesale trade	6
Finance and insurance	6
Health care and social assistance	6
Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting	5
Arts, entertainment and recreation	3
Transportation and warehousing	2
Real estate and rental and leasing	2
Mining and oil and gas extraction	1
Utilities	1
Information and cultural industries	1
Educational services	1

Note: Percentages do not add to 100 due to rounding.

Table 2. Distribution of sample by region

Region	Percentage of total
Ontario	45
Atlantic Canada	23
Quebec	12
Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta & Territories	12
British Columbia	8

⁷ Results were weighted to reflect the most recent data available from Statistics Canada. For more information, see Key Small Business Statistics – July 2005, *How many businesses are there in Canada?* available at www.strategis.ic.gc.ca. Statistics Canada data include both full- and part-time employees and do not include indeterminate businesses (i.e., businesses that do not have a payroll).

⁸ For detailed information on industry classification, see <http://www.statcan.ca/english/Subjects/Standard/naics/2002/naics02-menu.htm>.

Support for employee volunteering

“I think volunteerism should be encouraged. It is good for the company’s image, good for employee morale, and good for the charity.”

“It wasn’t just encouraged, it was supported. I remember crossing the finish line and being handed my timesheet to sign.”

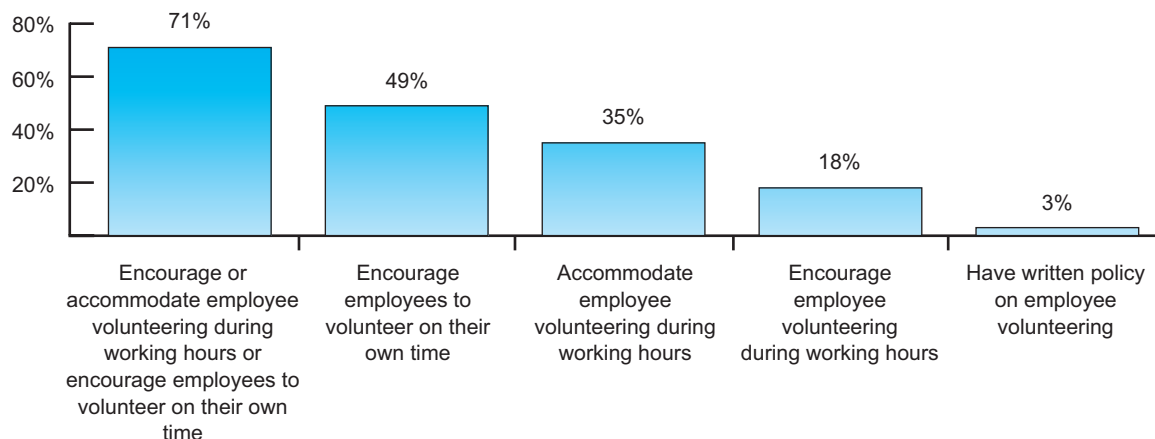
In this section, we present an overview of current levels of support for employee volunteering among companies operating in Canada. We begin with an examination of how many companies support employee volunteering. This is followed by an examination of the various ways in which companies that support employee volunteering choose to do so. We conclude the section with an exploration of the linkages between corporate giving and volunteering and an examination of the types of organizations or causes most likely to be targeted for corporate support. Our findings indicate that although there is widespread support for employee volunteering among businesses in Canada, this support more often involves accommodating employee volunteer activities rather than actively encouraging them.

Extent of support

To understand how many companies support employee volunteering, we asked businesses if they encourage or accommodate employee volunteer activities during working hours and whether they encourage employees to volunteer on their own time. To assess their commitment to supporting employee volunteerism, we also asked if they had a written policy on employee volunteering.

Seventy-one percent (71%) of respondents indicated that their company either accommodated or encouraged employee volunteering during regular working hours and/or encouraged employees to volunteer on their own time (see Figure 1). Companies were most likely to encourage employees to volunteer on their own time, with half (49%) indicating that they did so. In comparison, just over one third (35%) said that they accommodated volunteering during working hours and only 18% actively encouraged it. Just over one quarter (26%) of respondents said their company *discouraged* volunteering during working hours. Very few companies (3%) reported having a written policy on employee volunteering.

Figure 1. Percentage of companies supporting employee volunteering



Note: Data are taken from different questions and therefore do not add to 100%.

Nature of support

There are many ways for corporations to support employee volunteering. The results of our survey indicate that the most common forms of support provided by Canadian businesses are allowing employees to adjust work schedules, providing time off without pay, and allowing access to company facilities or equipment. In this section, we examine the various ways that businesses support the volunteer activities of their employees.

The findings presented in this section apply only to the 71% of companies that either accommodate or encourage employee volunteering during working hours and/or encourage employees to volunteer on their own time.

Providing time off

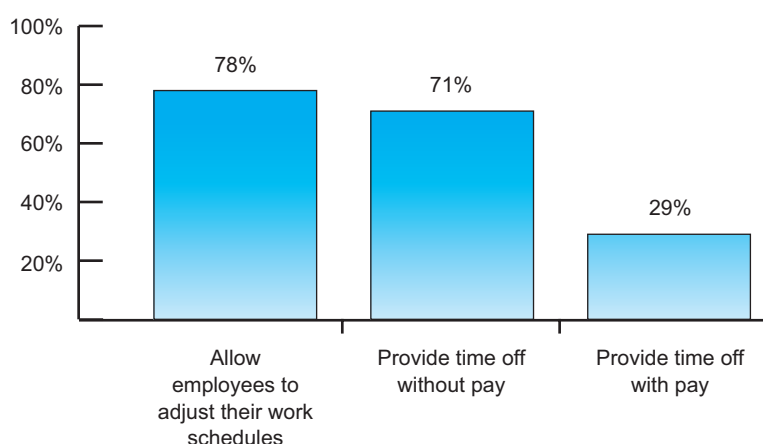
Because lack of time is one of the biggest barriers to volunteering (Hall et al., 2006), one of the most important ways that companies can support employee volunteering is to allow employees to adjust their work schedules to accommodate their volunteer activities or provide time off work – with or without pay – for volunteering. Not surprisingly, businesses are more likely to allow employees to adjust work schedules or take time off *without pay* than they are to allow employees to take time off with pay. More than three quarters (78%) of businesses that support employee volunteering allow employees to adjust work schedules, and just under three quarters (71%) allow them to take time off without pay (see Figure 2). In contrast, less than one third (29%) of companies allow employees to take time off work with pay to volunteer.

“My employer would let me take the time I needed, as long as I could make it up and asked ahead of time.”

“My employer thought it was a great thing. I would have to leave early on Friday afternoons to make my shift [at the volunteer site] and there was no hesitation in letting me go early. I didn’t have to make up the time.”

“I had to leave early for my volunteer work and I would just rearrange my day and start earlier to make up for the time.”

Figure 2. Percentage of companies allowing employees to adjust work schedules and/or take time off to volunteer



Note: Percentages do not add to 100 because respondents could choose more than one response. The data presented in this figure apply only to companies that accommodate or encourage employee volunteering during working hours and/or encourage employees to volunteer on their own time.

Other forms of support

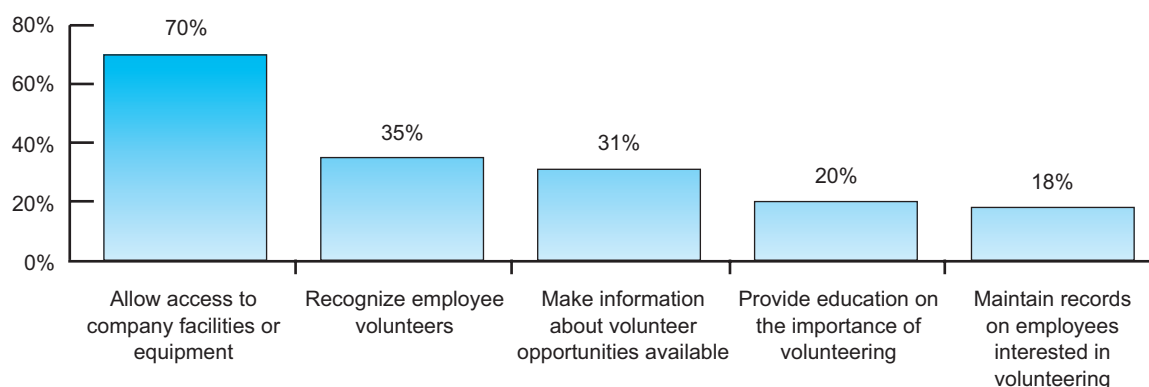
“I didn’t get paid for the time I took off, but my employer gave me other benefits. For example, if I needed something couriered I could do it through the business and he paid for it.”

“Photocopying, supplies, whatever, as long as it doesn’t get to be too much, they [employer] are happy to provide it.”

Companies can support employee volunteering in a variety of ways beyond allowing employees to adjust work schedules or take time off to volunteer. They can, for example, allow employees access to company facilities or equipment for their volunteer activities. Businesses that are interested in taking a more active role in encouraging employees to volunteer can collaborate with nonprofit organizations to provide information about volunteer opportunities to employees. They can also maintain records of the skills and experience of employees who are interested in volunteering; provide education on the importance of volunteering or ways of getting involved; and recognize the contributions of employees who are interested in volunteering.

The most common of these other forms of support is allowing employees access to company facilities or equipment such as computers, fax machines, or meeting rooms for their volunteer activities. Seventy percent (70%) of companies that support employee volunteering allow employees access to facilities or equipment (see Figure 3). In comparison, about one third of businesses that support employee volunteering recognize the contributions of employee volunteers (35%) or make information about volunteer opportunities available to their employees (31%). Approximately one in five provides education on the importance of volunteering (20%) or maintains records of the skills and experience of employee volunteers (18%).

Figure 3. Percentage of companies providing other forms of support to employee volunteers



Note: Percentages do not add to 100 because respondents could choose more than one response. The data presented in this figure apply only to companies that accommodate or encourage employee volunteering during working hours and/or encourage employees to volunteer on their own time.

Linking corporate volunteering and giving

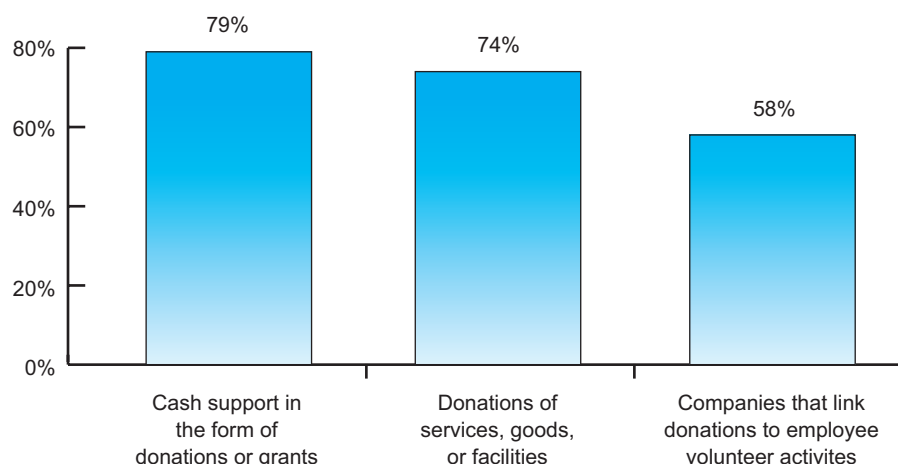
There are many ways in which businesses can assist nonprofit organizations other than supporting employee volunteerism. Corporations can, for example, donate money directly to organizations or provide free (in-kind) goods or services. To find out how corporate volunteer initiatives relate to other forms of corporate support for nonprofit organizations, we asked companies that supported employee volunteering about the others forms of support they provide to nonprofit organizations or charitable causes. Those that provided other forms of support were asked if this support was linked to the volunteer activities of their employees.

We found that most businesses that support employee volunteering also support nonprofit organizations or charitable causes in other ways and that most companies that provide other forms of support link this support to employee volunteering. More than three quarters (79%) of businesses that support employee volunteering provide cash support in the form of donations or grants to charitable causes or nonprofit organizations (see Figure 4). Just under three quarters (74%) donate services, goods, or facilities. Finally, more than half (58%) of companies that provide these other forms of support link them to employee volunteer activities.

“The company contributes over six figures to [the charity that the employees volunteer for].”

“They give a lot of money to local groups. Not just where we volunteer, but definitely there as well.”

Figure 4. Percentage of companies donating money, services, goods, or facilities to nonprofit organizations or charitable causes



Note: Percentages do not add to 100 because respondents could choose more than one response. The data presented in this figure apply only to companies that accommodate or encourage employee volunteering during working hours and/or encourage employees to volunteer on their own time.

Targeting types of organizations or causes

Canada has 161,000 registered charities and incorporated nonprofit organizations (Hall et al., 2005). These organizations work in a wide variety of fields including health, social services, education, international development, environment, arts and culture, and sports and recreation. Corporations might choose to focus their support on particular causes or types of organizations for various reasons including their broader community investment strategy; the interests of key stakeholders including employees; the nature of their business; their business objectives; or their company vision.

To explore this issue, we asked companies that supported employee volunteering what types of organizations or causes they targeted for support. We found that 58% of businesses operating in Canada target specific types of nonprofit organizations or causes with their corporate volunteer initiatives. The organizations or causes most likely to be targeted are those relating to health (16%), social services (13%), and sports and recreation (12%, see Figure 5).

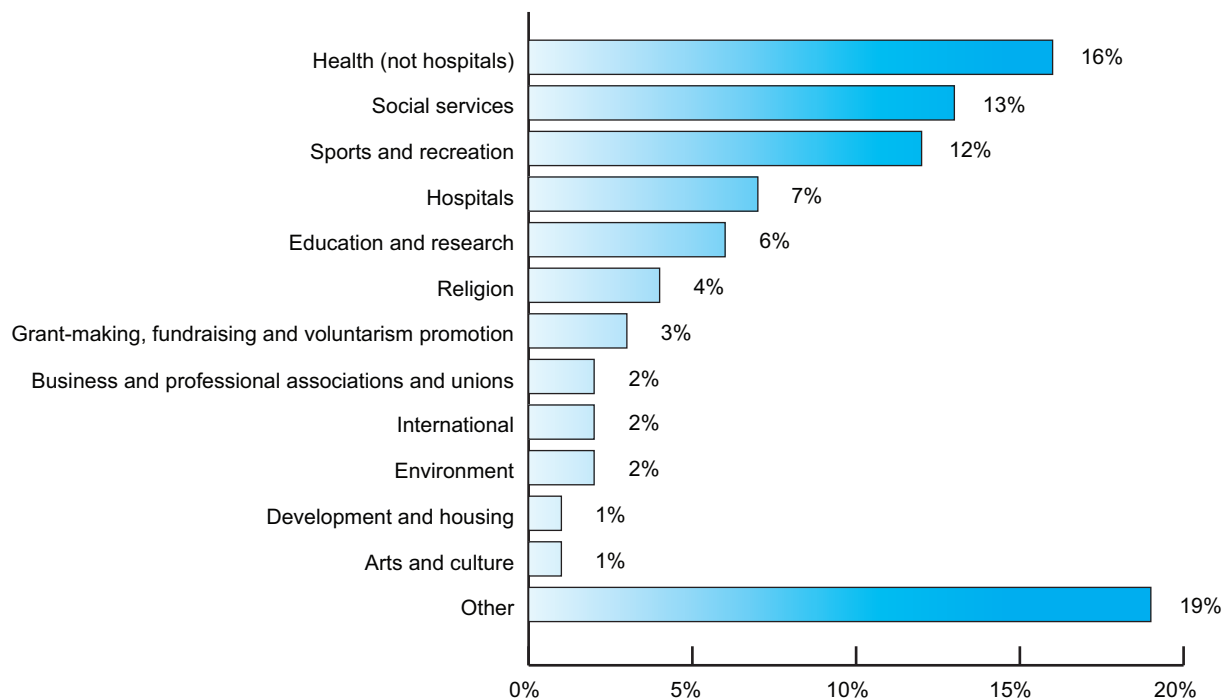
“There are clear lists of exclusions in terms of what we can get support for.”

“The preference is that we volunteer for a charity that is also a client of the firm.”

“We can ask our manager to support a particular cause this year, but it has to match the list from head office. Certain types of charities are more likely to be supported.”

“Nothing too controversial. It has to make the business look good.”

Figure 5. Types of organizations and causes targeted for support



Note: Percentages do not add to 100 because respondents could choose more than one response. The data presented in this figure apply only to companies that accommodate or encourage employee volunteering during working hours and/or encourage employees to volunteer on their own time.

Corporate volunteer programs

“My employer has dedicated staff that do nothing but liaise with [the charity]. There is one person in Toronto and that is her full-time job.”

“There are always emails going around work asking for volunteers for charitable events.”

“I don’t know if they really planned to pay for the time, but I wrote it on my timesheet and no one said anything.”

We have seen that many businesses support the volunteer activities of their employees by allowing them to adjust their work schedules, take time off to volunteer, or use company facilities or equipment. Some also support employee volunteering more actively, for example by making information about volunteer opportunities available to employees or providing education about volunteering. A few companies, however, go even further and operate programs that coordinate and support employee volunteer activities.

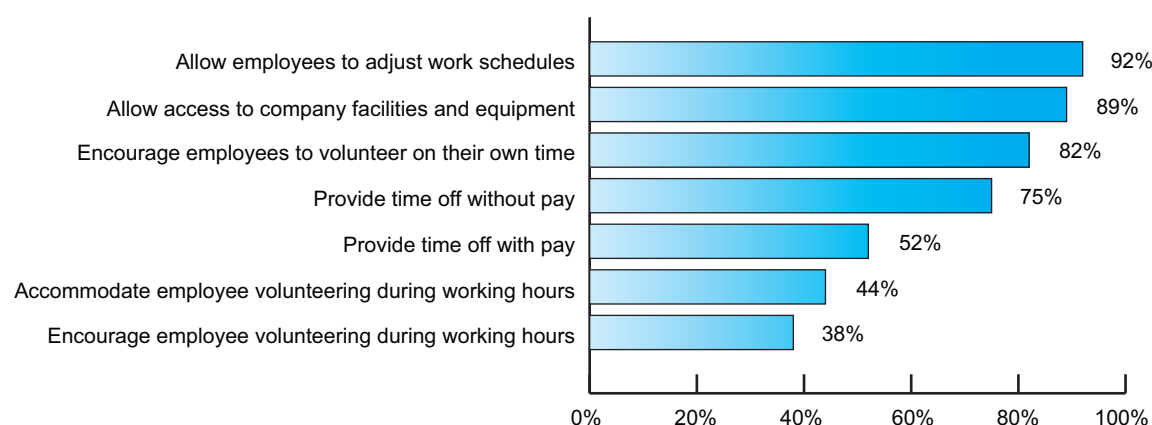
This section focuses on businesses that invest company resources in a corporate volunteer program. The findings presented here provide insight into the operation of formal corporate volunteer programs and allow companies with such programs to see how they compare to their peers. Our results indicate that corporate volunteer programs are in the early stages of development in Canada. Only 14% of businesses that support employee volunteering have a corporate volunteer program supported by company resources. The findings presented in this section apply only to these companies.⁹

Nature of programs

An overwhelming majority of companies with corporate volunteer programs allow employees to adjust their work schedules to accommodate volunteering (92%) and use company facilities or equipment for volunteer activities (89%, see Figure 6). Almost as many encourage employees to volunteer on their own time (82%). Three quarters (75%) of businesses with corporate volunteer programs allow employees to take time off or leaves of absence without pay and more than half (52%) allow them to take time off *with* pay. However, only 44% accommodate employee volunteering during working hours and just 38% actively encourage it.

⁹ These findings cannot, therefore, be compared to the findings presented in the previous section because they are a subset of the data presented previously.

Figure 6. Ways companies with corporate volunteer programs support employee volunteers



Note: Data are taken from different questions and therefore do not add to 100%. The data presented in this figure apply only to companies that have a corporate volunteer program supported by company resources.

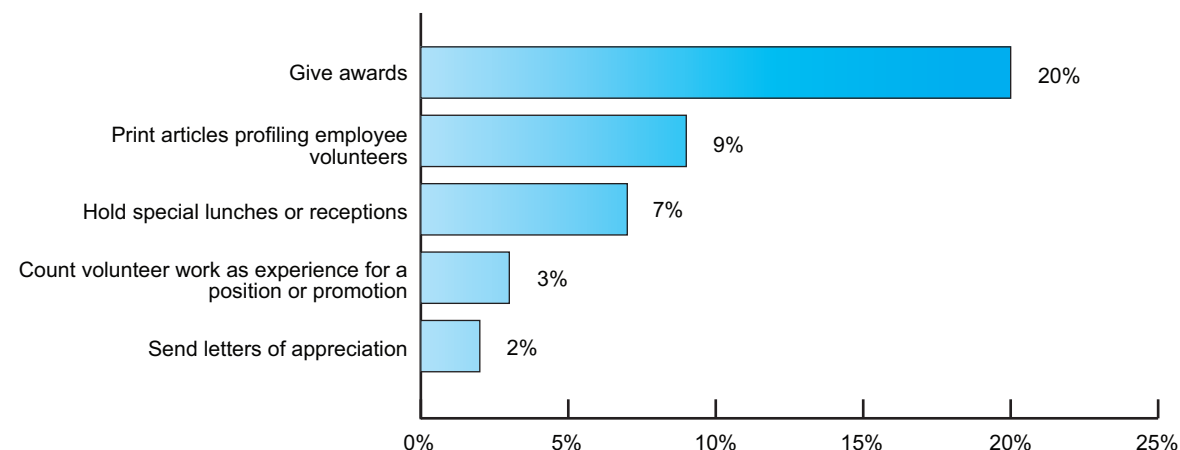
Recognizing employee volunteers

We mentioned earlier that 35% of companies that support employee volunteering recognize the contributions of employee volunteers. Among companies with corporate volunteer programs, this proportion increases to 52%. The most common form of recognition is giving awards. One in five companies (20%) with a corporate volunteer program gives awards to employee volunteers (see Figure 7). Other forms of recognition include printing articles in the company's newsletter or magazine profiling employee volunteers (9%), special lunches or receptions for employee volunteers (7%), counting relevant volunteer activities as experience when considering a candidate for a position or promotion (3%), and sending letters of appreciation to employee volunteers (2%).

"It certainly builds your professional reputation to be profiled by the company for your volunteer efforts."

"Each year they have a special event for the volunteers. It is just so nice."

Figure 7. Ways companies with corporate volunteer programs recognize employee volunteers



Note: Percentages do not add to 100 because respondents could choose more than one response. The data presented in this figure apply only to companies that have a corporate volunteer program supported by company resources.

“In addition to the one paid staff member, there are regional champions who volunteer to coordinate the events in their regions.”

“It is handled by human resources in our company. It is seen as an employee benefit to be able to volunteer during work time.”

Managing corporate volunteer programs

To achieve its potential, a corporate volunteer program should be managed like any other program: by setting objectives and by planning, delivering, evaluating, and reporting on its performance and challenges. Some of the key attributes of a successful corporate volunteer program include dedicated staff and resources, sound leadership and support from senior management, formalized policies and practices, and monitoring and evaluation.¹⁰

To understand how companies manage their corporate volunteer programs, we asked companies with these programs how many employees work in the program as part of their paid job responsibilities and who provides leadership to the program. We also asked if they have a written policy, if they track employee volunteer time, and whether they evaluate their program. We discuss their answers to these questions below.

Paid staff

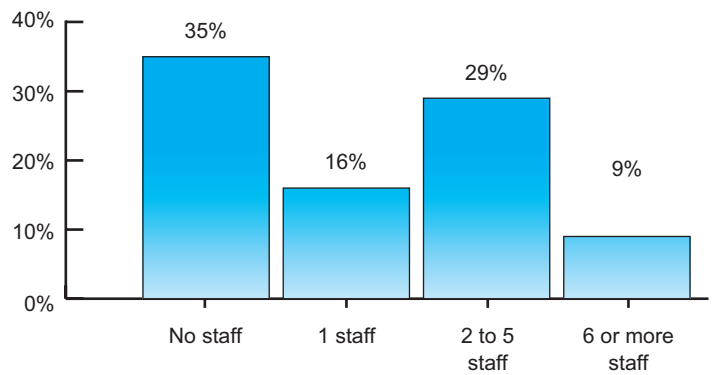
Corporate volunteer programs need staff to provide day-to-day management and to coordinate activities. Employees may provide support to the company's employee volunteering program either on their own time or as part of their paid job responsibilities. Companies that are committed to employee volunteering usually assign someone to work in the company's corporate volunteer program.

The results of the survey indicate that more than half (54%) of companies with corporate volunteer programs have at least one staff member assigned to work in the program as part of their official paid job responsibilities (see Figure 8). Almost one third (29%) have between two and five staff members working in their corporate volunteer program and 9% have six or more. Presumably, the 35% of programs that have no staff assigned to them are operated by employees on a volunteer basis.¹¹

¹⁰ For more information, see *Measuring Corporate Volunteerism* at http://www.csrwire.com/pdf/LBG_one_sheet.pdf and *2002 Fortune 500 performance on the VeraWorks Quality Factors for Superior Corporate Volunteer Programs* at <http://www.veraworks.com/EVPQualityFactors1.html>.

¹¹ Twelve percent (12%) of respondents did not answer this question.

Figure 8. Number of paid staff working in corporate volunteer programs



Note: Don't know and refused responses are not presented. The data presented in this figure apply only to companies that have a corporate volunteer program supported by company resources.

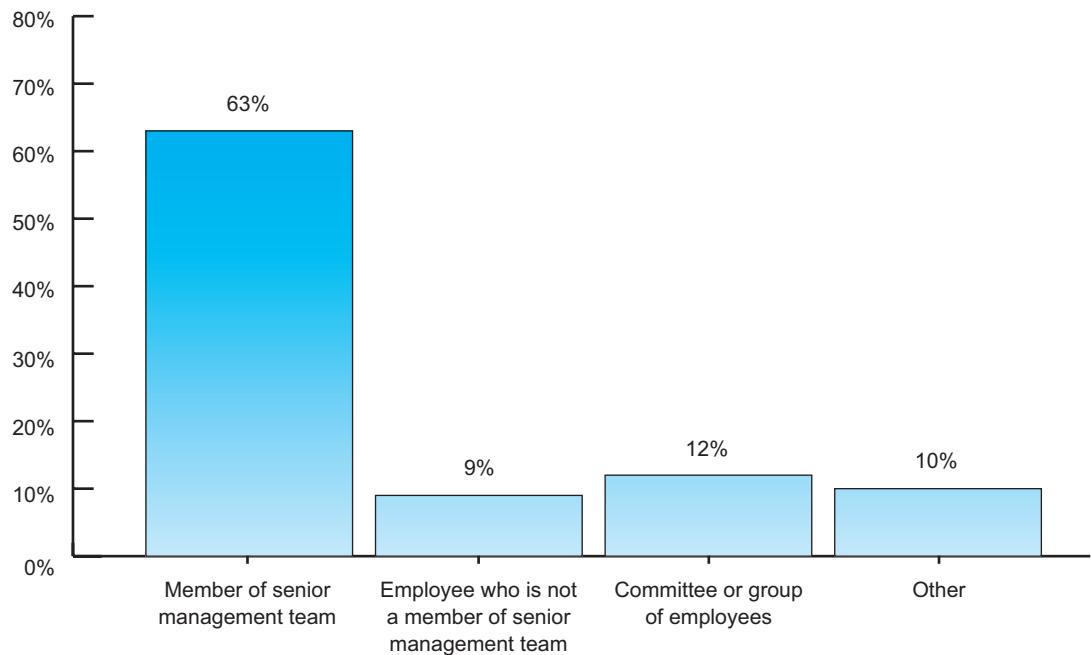
Leadership

In addition to day-to-day management and coordination, corporate volunteer programs require leaders who are empowered to make policy decisions and provide direction to the program. We found that the majority (63%) of corporate volunteer programs in Canada are led by a member of the company's senior management team (see Figure 9). Twelve percent (12%) of programs are led by a committee or group of employees and 9% are led by an employee who is not part of senior management. The fact that almost two thirds of corporate volunteer programs are led by a senior manager suggests that these programs are strategic initiatives for the company.

“Some of the decisions are made centrally at head office, but I [manager] decide what local events we will support.”

“There is an employee who has kind of taken it on as her personal thing. She’s the champion of these causes and decides for us [at a local facility] what we’ll support.”

Figure 9. Leadership of corporate volunteer programs



Note: Don't know and refused responses are not presented. The data presented in this figure apply only to companies that have a corporate volunteer program supported by company resources.

“Yes, it’s a formal policy. But don’t ask me where to find it.”

“It’s kind of informal in terms of the policy, but we are now reporting the hours on our annual reviews.”

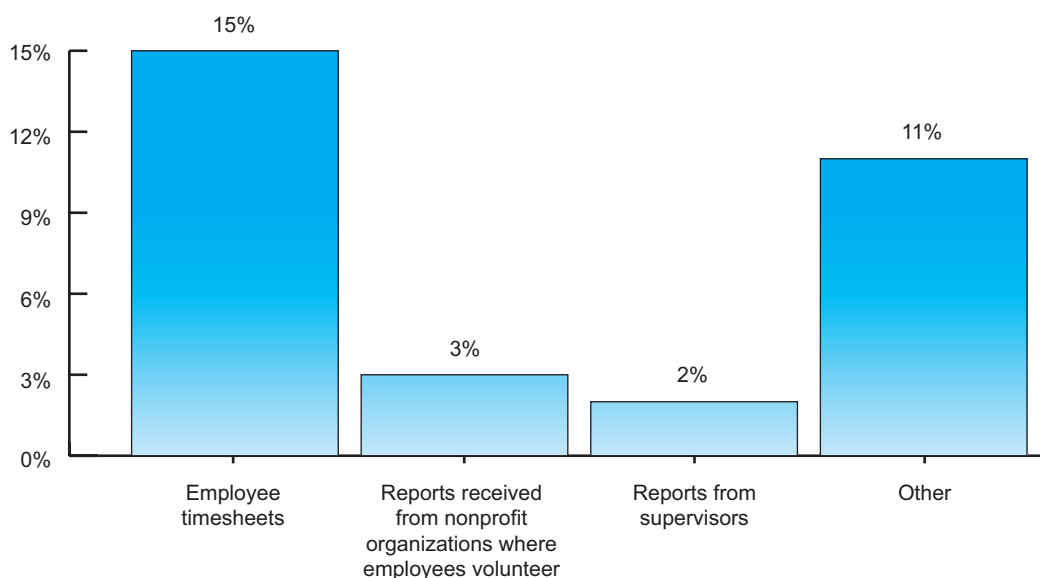
Policies, monitoring, and evaluation

Written policies are a way for companies to demonstrate their commitment to their corporate volunteer programs. Policies can also improve the functioning of the program and may encourage employee participation. We mentioned that previously that only 3% of all companies have written policies on employee volunteering. This proportion increases to 13% among companies with formal corporate volunteer programs.

To understand how companies monitor and evaluate their corporate volunteer programs, we asked them if they tracked employee volunteer time and if they evaluated their support for employee volunteering. We found that 30% of companies with corporate volunteer programs track employee volunteer time. The most common way to do this is via employee timesheets; 15% of companies with corporate volunteer programs use timesheets to track employee volunteer time (see Figure 10). We also found that 41% of companies with corporate volunteer programs evaluate their support for employee volunteering.

Given that more than half of corporate volunteer programs have staff assigned to them and almost two thirds are led by a senior manager, the proportion that have written policies and carry out monitoring and evaluation activities is somewhat surprising.

Figure 10. Methods of tracking volunteer time



Note: Don't know and refused responses are not presented. The data presented in this figure apply only to companies that have a corporate volunteer program supported by company resources.

Group volunteering

Group volunteering can be a way for companies to meet certain business objectives. For example, although both individual and group volunteering can build employees' skills, group volunteering can strengthen employee work teams. It can also be used to enhance the company's visibility and image in the community.¹²

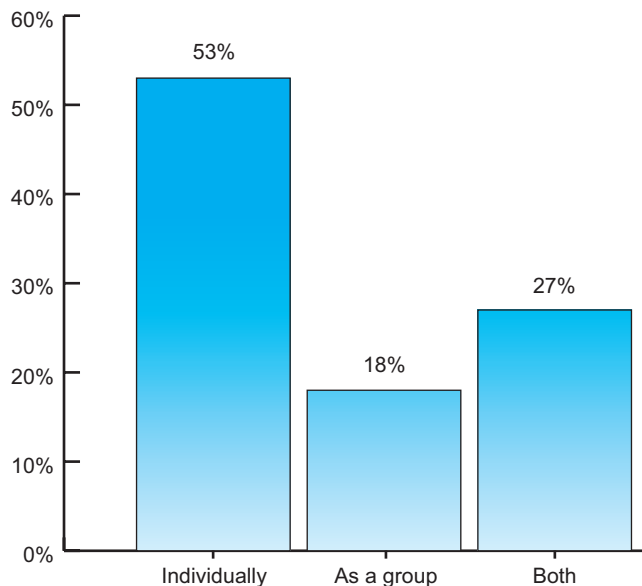
To understand current practices regarding group volunteering, we asked businesses that had corporate volunteer programs if their employees volunteered individually or as a group. More than half (53%) said that their employees volunteer individually while 18% said that they volunteer as a group (see Figure 11). Just over a quarter (27%) said that they do both.

"Our company came out and videotaped us at our event and then incorporated it into a promotional spot on TV."

"You see organizations having groups of employees sign up enmasse for the [charitable event]. They have such camaraderie."

"They were all there [at the charitable event] with their company logos on their t-shirts. You could tell they were all there as a group. They seemed genuine in their approach, and glad to be there."

Figure 11. Individual vs. Group volunteering



Note: Don't know and refused responses are not presented. The data presented in this figure apply only to companies that have a corporate volunteer program supported by company resources.

¹² Companies may, for example, ask employees who are volunteering as a group to wear company t-shirts. Or they may issue a media release highlighting the volunteer activity. For more information on group volunteering, see <http://www.serviceleader.org/new/volunteers/articles/2004/03/000216.php>

Benefits and challenges of employee volunteering

“Everyone sees our company out there. It’s advertising.”

“I want to work for a company that supports what I care about.”

“It’s also about doing something just because it is the right thing to do.”

“I didn’t get paid for the time I took off to volunteer anymore because it was just the two of us and he just couldn’t afford to do that.”

“The work would still be there when I got back. Either that or someone would have to cover for me.”

Businesses are more likely to support employee volunteering if they believe that they will reap some benefit. Possible benefits include improved public image, improved employee morale, and improved relations with the community. On the other hand, businesses may refuse to support employee volunteering or stop supporting it if they perceive or experience problems. Potential problems include cost and difficulty covering the workload of employees who are volunteering. Below we examine the perceived benefits and challenges of corporate volunteer initiatives. Our findings indicate that, for most companies, the perceived benefits of supporting employee volunteering outweigh the perceived challenges.

Benefits

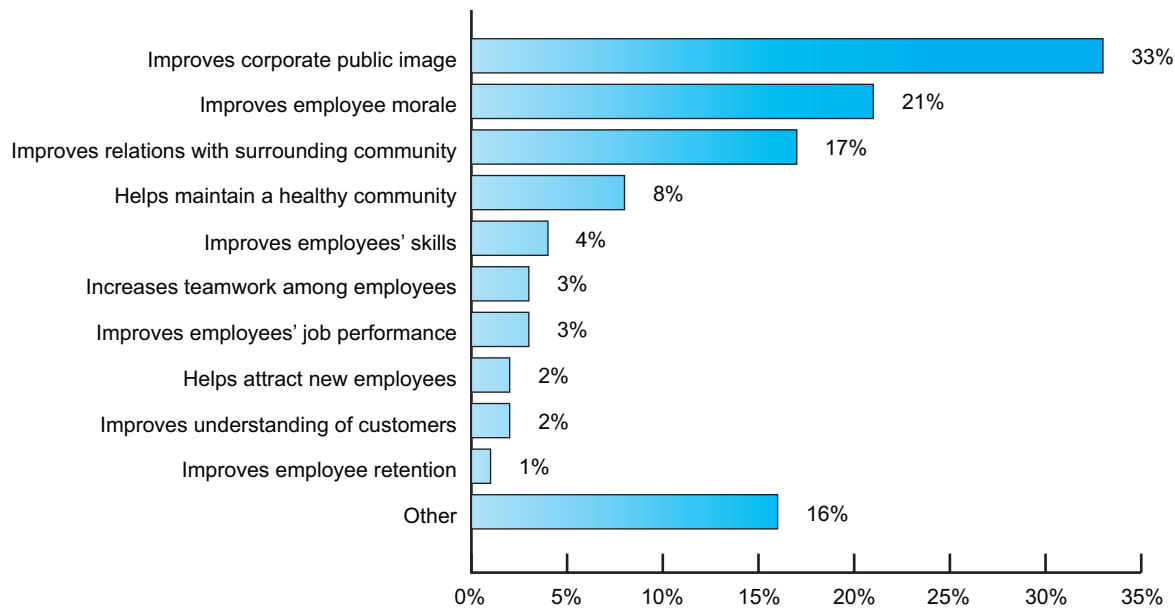
We asked the 71% of companies that support employee volunteering in some way to tell us what they thought were the top two benefits of employee volunteering for their company. The most common response was that it improves the public image of the corporation. One third of companies (33%) said that this was one of the top two benefits of employee volunteering (see Figure 12). Other common responses were that it improves employee morale (21%), improves relations with the surrounding community (17%), and helps maintain a healthy community (8%).

Challenges

More than half (51%) of the companies that support employee volunteering said that they did not face any challenges in providing this support. However, nearly one quarter (23%) said that difficulty covering regular work load is a challenge for them (see Figure 13). Cost was mentioned as a challenge by only 3% of companies.

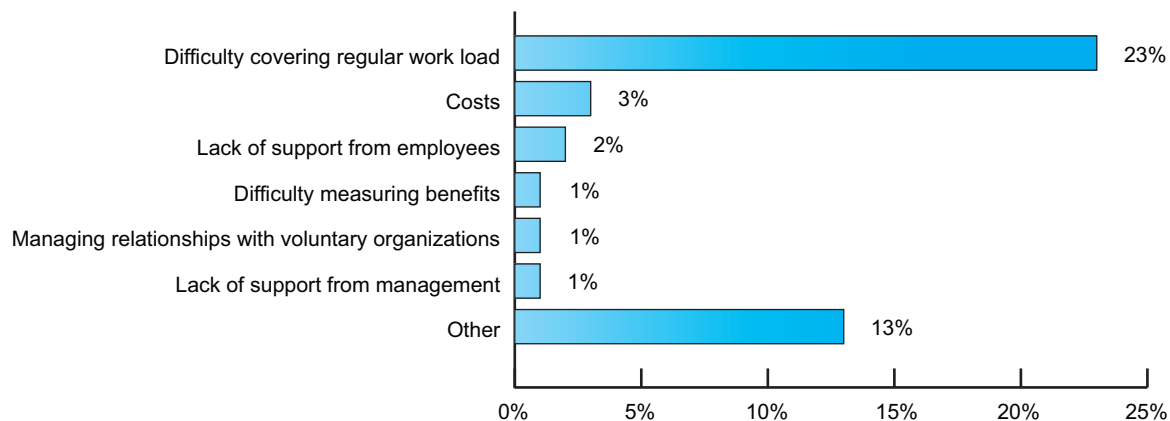
The 25% of companies that did not support employee volunteering were asked to explain their lack of support. Nearly one quarter (22%) of these businesses said that they had never considered supporting employee volunteering. Fourteen percent (14%) said they didn’t think it was their responsibility. Only 5% said they weren’t interested in encouraging their employees to volunteer.

Figure 12. Perceived benefits of supporting employee volunteering



Note: Don't know and refused responses are not presented. Percentages do not add to 100 because respondents were asked to state two top benefits.

Figure 13. Perceived challenges of supporting employee volunteering



Note: Don't know and refused responses are not presented.

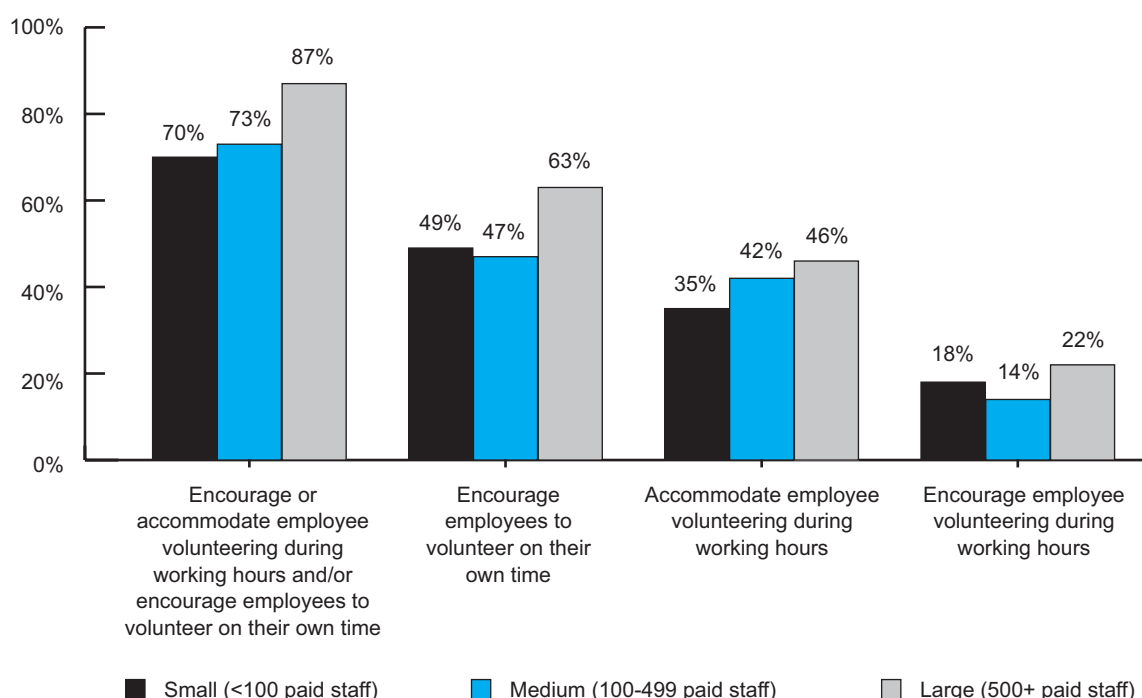
Company size and region

Support for employee volunteering varies with the size of the company. Large businesses (those with 500 or more paid staff) are more likely to accommodate or encourage employee volunteering than are small businesses (those with fewer than 100 paid staff). We found few significant regional differences, however. Below, we explore the impact of company size and region on support for employee volunteering.

Company size

Large businesses are more likely than small businesses to accommodate or encourage employee volunteering during working hours. More than two thirds (68%) of large businesses either accommodate or encourage employee volunteering during working hours, compared to 53% of small businesses (see Figure 14). Large businesses are also more likely to encourage employees to volunteer on their own time. Almost two thirds (63%) of large businesses encourage employees to volunteer on their own time compared to just half (49%) of small businesses. Overall, 87% of large businesses support employee volunteering in some way compared to 70% of small businesses. Comparisons with medium-sized businesses cannot be made because the observed differences are not statistically significant.

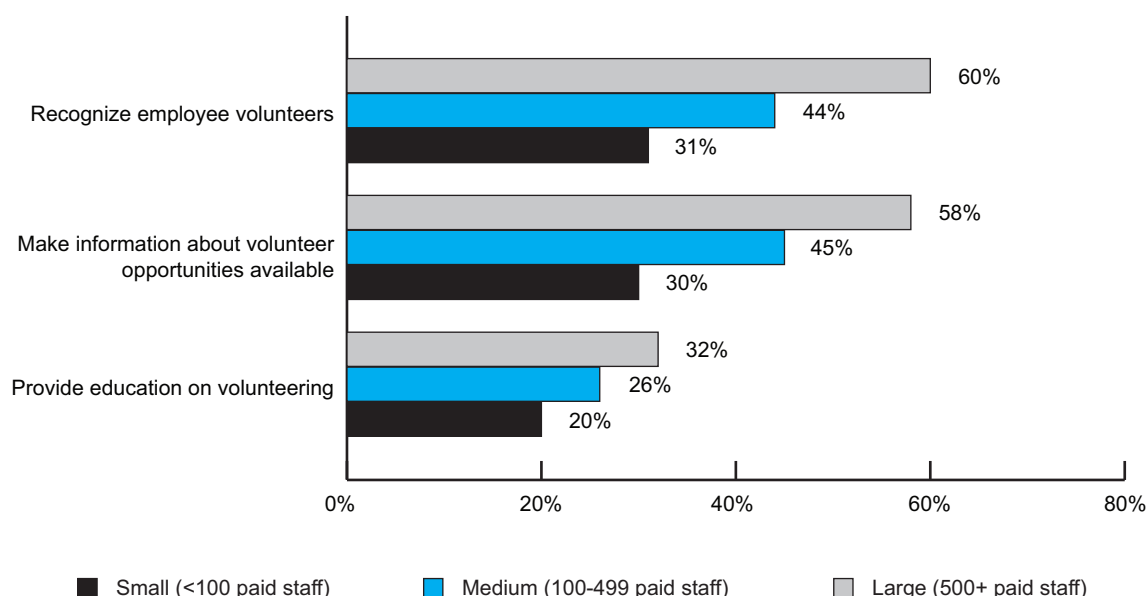
Figure 14. Percentage of companies supporting employee volunteering by company size



Note: Percentages do not add to 100 because respondents could choose more than one response. No comparisons can be made with medium-sized businesses as observed differences are not statistically significant.

Large businesses are also more likely than small- and medium-sized businesses to be actively engaged in recognizing and facilitating employee volunteer activities. For example, 60% of large companies recognize employee volunteers, compared to only 44% of medium-sized companies and 31% of small companies (see Figure 15). Similarly, more than half (58%) of large companies make information about volunteer opportunities available to employees, compared to only 45% of medium-sized companies and 30% of small companies. Large companies are more likely than small companies to provide education on volunteering to their employees (32% vs. 20%).¹³

Figure 15. Ways of facilitating employee volunteering by company size



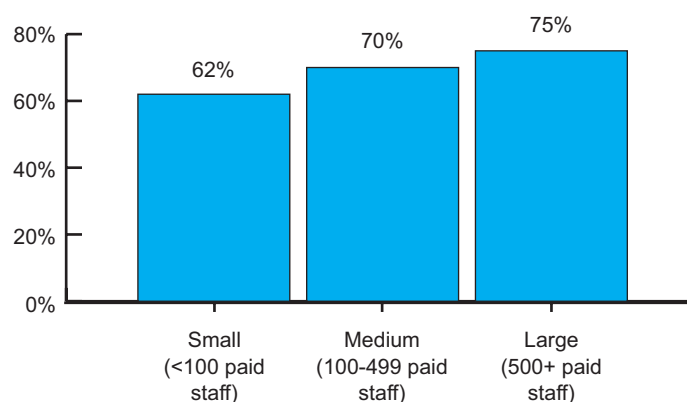
Note: Percentages do not add to 100 because respondents could choose more than one response. With regard to providing education on volunteering, no comparisons can be made with medium-sized businesses because the observed differences are not statistically significant.

Large companies are more likely than small companies to link their financial and in-kind donations to their corporate volunteer initiatives. Among companies that provide financial and in-kind support to nonprofit organizations and causes, 75% of large companies link this support to the volunteer activities of their employees (see Figure 16). In comparison, only 62% of small businesses link their activities in this way. Again, no comparison can be made with medium-sized companies.

Finally, large companies are more likely than small companies to target specific types of nonprofit organizations and causes for support through their corporate volunteer initiatives. Seventy-six (76%) percent of large companies target specific types of organizations or causes compared to only 57% of small businesses.

¹³ Comparisons with medium-sized businesses cannot be made in this case because the observed differences are not statistically significant.

Figure 16. Percentage of companies linking financial and in-kind donations to employee volunteer activities by company size

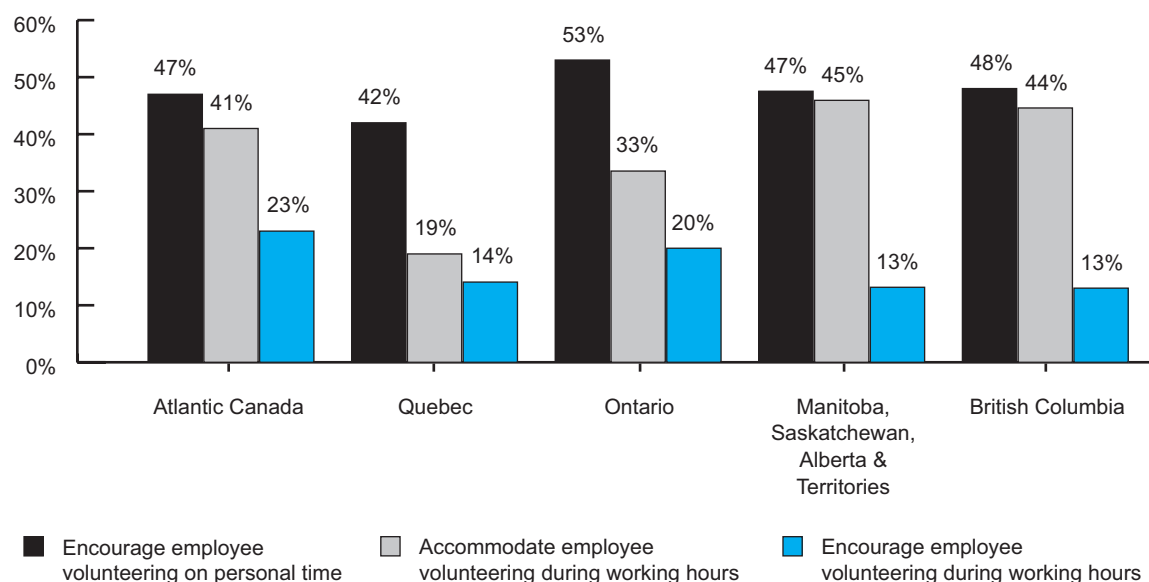


Note: No comparisons can be made with medium-sized businesses as observed differences are not statistically significant.

Region

The profile of support for employee volunteering is the same across the country. Businesses in all regions are more likely to encourage employees to volunteer on their own time than they are to accommodate volunteer activities during working hours. And they are more likely to accommodate volunteering during working hours than they are to actively encourage it (see Figure 17). Comparisons between regions are, however, inappropriate as the survey was not stratified by region and most differences across regions are not statistically significant.

Figure 17. Percentage of companies supporting employee volunteering by region



Note: Percentages do not add to 100 because respondents could choose more than one response. No comparisons can be made among regions as most observed differences are not statistically significant.

Conclusions

Corporate volunteer initiatives can significantly impact the quality of life enjoyed by Canadians, but the evidence suggests that these initiatives are still in the early stages of development. The majority of Canadian businesses support employee volunteering in some way. Almost three quarters either encourage or accommodate employee volunteer activities during working hours and/or encourage their employees to volunteer on their own time. The nature of the support provided by companies is not, however, particularly proactive. For example, half of all businesses encourage employees to volunteer on their own time but only one third accommodate volunteer activity during working hours. Even fewer – one in five – encourage volunteering during working hours. Business support for employee volunteering also appears to be fairly informal. Only 3% of all businesses have a written policy on employee volunteering.

The most common ways to support employee volunteering are allowing employees to adjust work schedules, providing time off without pay, and allowing employees access to company facilities or equipment for their volunteer activities. Some corporate volunteer programs support group volunteering and more than one quarter of employees of companies that have a corporate volunteer program volunteer both as a group and individually. Many companies also give financial and in-kind donations to the organizations and causes for which their employees volunteer. More than half of companies that support employee volunteering target specific nonprofit organizations and causes. Businesses that support employee volunteering perceive several benefits, including improved public image, improved employee morale, and improved relations with the surrounding community. Our findings also show that large businesses are more likely than small ones to support employee volunteering.

Implications

These findings have several implications for businesses, employees, and the nonprofit organizations that work to improve life for Canadians. We discuss the implications for all three groups below.

The nature of the support that most companies provide to employee volunteers makes it difficult for them to reap full benefits from their corporate volunteer initiatives. For example, encouraging employees to volunteer on their own time is unlikely to substantially improve employee morale or increase teamwork among employees. The more than two thirds of companies that do nothing to recognize the contributions of employee volunteers may also be failing to realize any benefits in terms of employee

morale. Finally, allowing employees to adjust their work schedules or use company facilities or equipment is unlikely to significantly affect the company's image or improve its relations with the surrounding community.

Employees who volunteer, or would like to volunteer, are also limited by the nature of the support provided by most businesses. Encouraging employees to volunteer on their own time will not help employees whose work or family responsibilities leave them with little free time for volunteering. It may also limit the types of volunteer activities that employees can participate in. Restricting support to certain types of organizations or causes also creates barriers for employees who are interested in volunteering for organizations or causes not on the company's approved list. Limitations such as this may lead to frustration among employees and to decreased support for corporate volunteer initiatives. On a more positive note, the large percentage of companies that are willing to accommodate employee volunteer activities suggests that many companies are open to requests for support. This is encouraging news for the millions of volunteers across the country who are also employees.¹⁴

For nonprofit organizations, these findings suggest that much remains to be done to educate Canadian businesses about the importance of volunteerism and the benefits that accrue to businesses that actively support it. Employer support for volunteering almost certainly has a positive impact on the number of people who volunteer and on the hours that volunteers contribute. However, nonprofit organizations cannot benefit fully from employee volunteers who are restricted to volunteering during non-working hours. The relatively narrow range of organizations and causes that companies target for support also presents a barrier for many organizations that could benefit from corporate volunteer initiatives. Finally, organizations need to be aware that many companies link corporate donations to employee volunteer activities.

Recommendations

In conclusion, we offer the following recommendations for businesses, nonprofit organizations, and governments. These recommendations are aimed at improving the effectiveness of corporate volunteer initiatives in Canada.

¹⁴ The 2004 Canada Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating found that 58% of Canada's 11.8 million volunteers had an employer (Hall et al., 2006).

Businesses should:

1. initiate volunteer programs themselves rather than merely reacting to requests from employees;
2. develop written policies on employee volunteering;
3. recognize the contributions of employee volunteers;
4. encourage, or at least try to accommodate, employee volunteering during working hours; and
5. consider supporting organizations or causes that are less popular with the corporate sector (e.g., development and housing).

Nonprofit organizations should:

1. collaborate with businesses to provide meaningful opportunities for employee volunteers;
2. recognize the less obvious supports provided by businesses to employee volunteers (e.g., adjustments to working hours or access to company facilities or equipment);
3. develop strategies to accommodate volunteers who are only available during non-working hours;
4. partner with large businesses if they need many volunteers and/or support a cause that is popular with the corporate sector (e.g., health); and
5. approach small businesses for support if they need only a few volunteers and/or support a cause that is less popular with the corporate sector (e.g., environment).

Governments should:

1. promote programs that educate Canadians about the value of volunteers and the importance of nonprofit organizations to Canadian communities;
2. support forums that promote and coordinate greater collaboration between businesses and nonprofit organizations;
3. continue to provide funding for nonprofit organizations to develop volunteer management programs (e.g., through the Canada Volunteerism Initiative);
4. fund research on the contributions of both businesses and nonprofit organizations to Canadian communities; and
5. consider providing tax benefits for companies that support employee volunteering.

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NOTES



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