

Corporate Volunteer Programs:

Boosting Employee Participation

By S. Mark Pancer, Evelina Rog & Mark C. Baetz

Research shows that Corporate Volunteer Programs (CVPs) benefit not only the community, but also employees and companies themselves. For CVPs to be successful, however, employees must be willing to participate.

This fact sheet is based on interviews with over 100 employees of the Ford Motor Company of Canada, which operates one of the largest CVPs in the country. It presents the six major factors that influence employees' interest in participating in a CVP and offers recommendations to companies that hope to motivate employees to get involved in such a program.¹

Factor 1: Employees' personal values, attitudes, and objectives

Employees who value volunteering, who believe that individuals should "give back" to the community, and who are concerned about the welfare of the disadvantaged in the community, will be more likely to participate in a CVP.

Recommendation: Create positive attitudes towards volunteering.

When informing employees about the CVP, outline the benefits of the program to the employee, the community, and the company. Use testimonials from employees and community agencies to convey what the program has accomplished and what employees and organizations have gained from the experience.

Employees will have a more positive attitude towards volunteering if participation is truly voluntary. Let employees choose whether or not they will participate in the program, how much time they will commit, and in what kinds of activities they will engage.

¹ This fact sheet is based on *Corporate Volunteer Programs: Maximizing Employee Motivation and Minimizing Barriers to Program Participation*, a report available online at www.kdc-cdc.ca.

Factor 2: The nature of the program

The more attractive the program is to employees, the more likely they will be to participate.

Recommendation: Make the program as appealing as possible.

Time off work is a major motivating factor for many employees. Consider offering release time for volunteering.

If the CVP is structured to encourage employees to volunteer in teams, retain an element of choice. Give employees some flexibility about the amount of time they spend on individual or team projects. Rather than specifying a specific number of employees per team, allow employees to create their own teams.

Factor 3: The kinds of volunteer opportunities available

Employees who can choose from volunteer opportunities that they find interesting, worthwhile, or fun are much more likely to take part in the program.

Recommendation: Provide interesting and meaningful volunteer opportunities.

Survey employees about the types of volunteer activities they would like to do, and which community organizations they are interested in supporting.

Provide a broad range of volunteer opportunities that appeal to a variety of employee interests, preferences, and goals. These should vary in terms of location, the kind of work required, and the type of community organization.

Encourage employees to suggest ideas for volunteer projects that are personally meaningful to them, or to identify agencies whose cause they are committed to. Whenever possible, include these in the CVP.



Factor 4: Company support for participation

The more the company does to support the CVP and make it easy for employees to volunteer, the more likely employees will be to participate.

Recommendation: Make it easy for employees to volunteer, and then support their efforts.

Provide the resources necessary to operate the program. Assign someone to coordinate the program. This person's duties should include selecting programs, liaising with community agencies, and arranging volunteer activities.

Clearly communicate the company's support for the CVP. For example, include a reference to volunteering in the company's mission statement.

Make sure that all managers support the program, and ensure that they have the resources they need to carry on their departments' work while staff are away on volunteer placements.

Factor 5: Personal support for volunteering

Support from family, friends, and especially one's co-workers, creates a positive attitude towards volunteering and makes volunteering more appealing.

Recommendation: Build personal and co-worker support for volunteering.

Encourage employees to support each other's volunteer activities.

Knowledge Development Centre
Canadian Centre for Philanthropy
425 University Ave., Suite 700
Toronto, ON M5G 1T6
tel. 416.597.2293
fax. 416.597.2294

For example, employees who organize volunteer events can be formally recognized in the company newsletter or on the company Web site.

Allow family members to get involved in some of the volunteer activities associated with the CVP. For example, encourage employees to bring their spouses and children to fundraising events.

Factor 6: Degree of satisfaction with volunteer experiences

Employees who have had rewarding volunteer experiences will be more likely to stay involved in the CVP.

Recommendation: Try to ensure that employees have a positive volunteer experience, and recognize them for their volunteer contributions.

Select volunteer opportunities that will allow employees to contribute meaningfully to the welfare of the community. Employees will be deterred from continuing in the CVP if they feel that there is no real need for the work they are doing, if there is not enough work to keep them busy, or if they do not feel that they are making a valuable contribution to the agency or its clients.

Gather feedback from employees about their volunteer experiences, and eliminate or change volunteer placements that do not provide meaningful, satisfying opportunities.

Recognize employees' volunteer contributions, both within and outside the program (e.g., through letters of appreciation from the company, articles in company publications featuring employees' volunteer activities, or volunteer appreciation events).

The Canadian Centre for Philanthropy's Knowledge Development Centre is funded through the Community Partnerships Program of the Department of Canadian Heritage as part of the Canada Volunteerism Initiative. The views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect those of the Department of Canadian Heritage.