

The Impact of Company Support on Employee Volunteering

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How does company support for volunteering affect volunteerism? In 2005, the University of Lethbridge undertook to answer this question by surveying Canadians who were members of an online research panel.¹ The 2,125 respondents were selected to represent the demographics of Canadians: they were evenly split on gender and represented national averages in terms of age and level of formal education. Just over 16% responded in French. This fact sheet reports on the findings of this research.

Employer support for volunteering

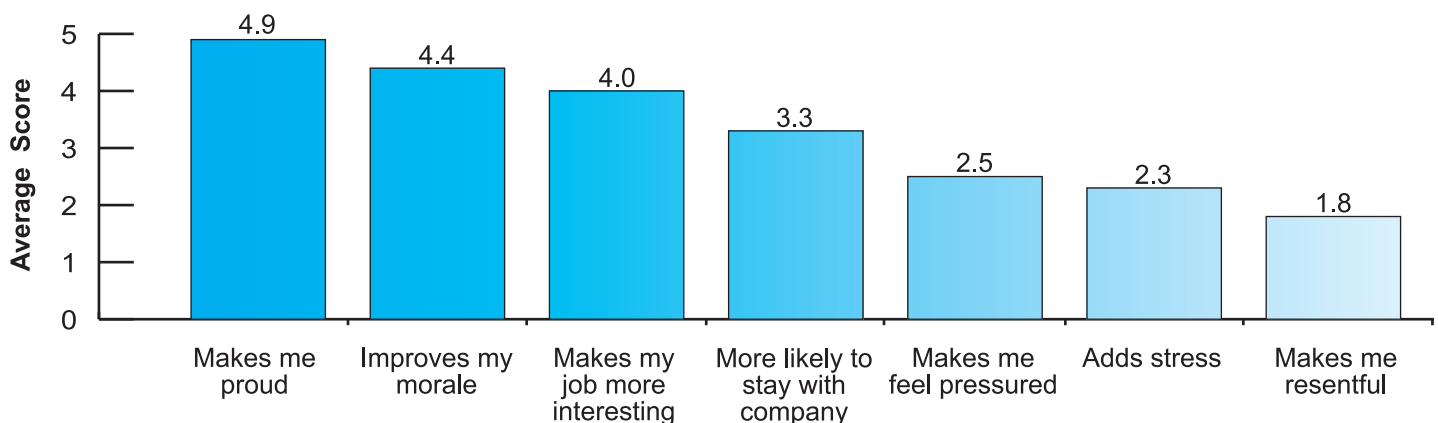
Seventeen percent (17%) of survey respondents reported that their employer offered some form of support for employees' volunteering efforts. This included access to company facilities or supplies, flexible work hours to accommodate volunteering, and time off work to volunteer. Respondents were asked to indicate on a seven-point scale whether employer support affected the amount of time they spent volunteering, with one meaning "decreased volunteer time" and 7 meaning "increased volunteer time." The average response was 4.75, indicating that employer support tended to have a positive impact on the amount of time spent volunteering.

About 68% of respondents who received employer support for their volunteering reported that this support had no effect on which organizations they volunteered for. Almost one in five (19%) reported that, because of the support of their employers, they volunteered for more organizations than they otherwise would have. Nearly one in ten (8%) reported that they volunteered for some causes because these causes were well regarded by their employer.

Employer-promoted causes

In addition to simply supporting employees' volunteer efforts, some employers select and promote specific causes. More than one in six respondents (16%) reported that their employers promoted specific causes. These respondents reported that, in general, employer promotion of a cause had a positive effect on their morale, made them proud to work for their employer, and made their job more interesting (see Figure 1).² They also reported that employer promotion of a cause did not increase their stress levels, make them feel pressured, or make them resentful.

Figure 1: Impact of employer-promoted causes on employees who volunteer



¹ Respondents were recruited from Zoomerang's online research panel (Zoomerang is an online survey service). Respondents receive points based on their participation in online surveys. These points can be exchanged for prizes.

² All questions in this section used a seven-point scale, where 1 indicated "not at all" and 7 indicated "very much."

Volunteering during work hours

About one-fifth (19%) of respondents said that their employer allowed them to take time off during normal work hours to volunteer. Almost half (48%) were not allowed to volunteer during work hours and the rest were uncertain. Less than half (42%) of the employees who were allowed to volunteer during work hours had done so in the past six months. On average, this group volunteered 8.5 hours per month during work hours.

Of the respondents who had volunteered during work hours in the past six months, one quarter (25%) had volunteered for community programs, more than one fifth (22%) had volunteered for children's programs, and one sixth (16%) had volunteered for educational causes (see Figure 2). Only 11% volunteered at a place of worship. Respondents were more likely to volunteer at a place of worship when volunteering on their own time (23%).

Impact of work-time volunteering on personal-time volunteering

Respondents who had volunteered during work hours in the six months prior to the survey did slightly

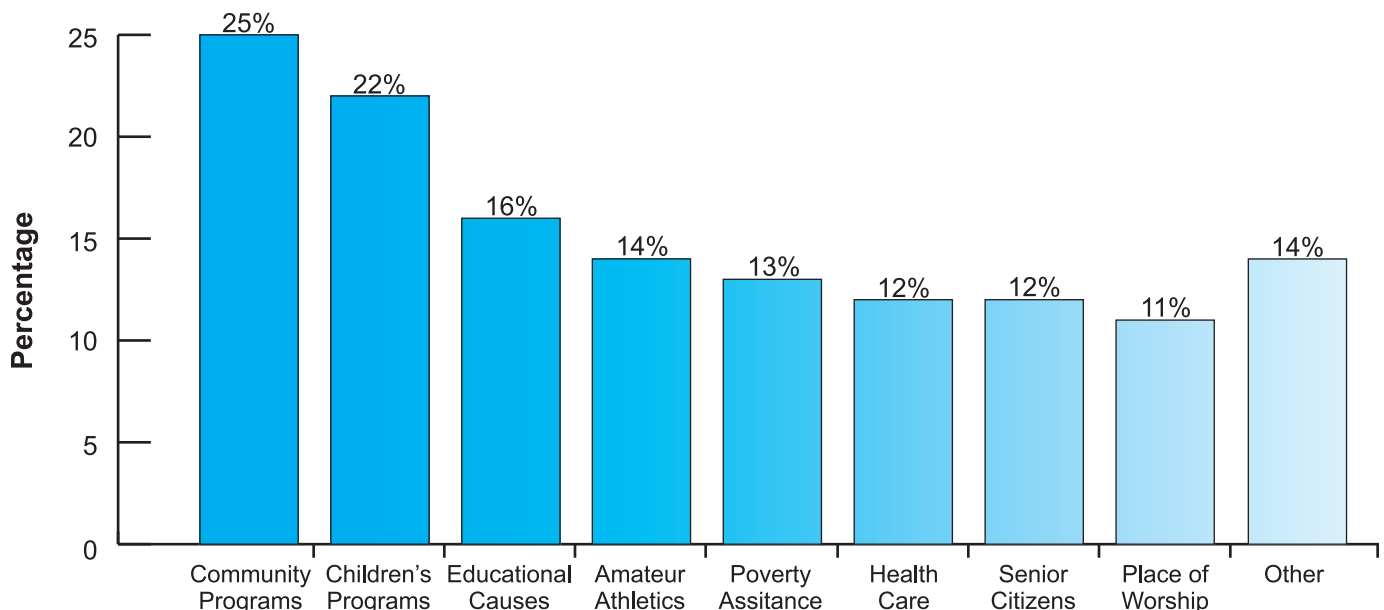
less personal-time volunteering than those who had not volunteered during work hours (2.5 hours vs. 2.7 hours per month). This suggests that work-time volunteering slightly displaces personal-time volunteering. Similarly, when asked, the entire pool of respondents reported that if their employer allowed them to volunteer during work hours, they would slightly decrease the volunteering they did on their personal time (3.9 on 7-point scale).

Taken together, these results suggest that volunteering during work hours may lead to a slight decrease in personal-time volunteering, but that this decrease is likely less than the additional hours generated by work-time volunteering. Therefore, employer support for volunteering likely leads to a net increase in volunteer hours.

Conclusion

Employees generally respond positively to employer support for volunteering. Overall, when employees are allowed to volunteer during work hours, it appears that their personal volunteering decreases somewhat but that their total volunteering increases.

Figure 2: Causes for which employees volunteer during work hours



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