

Corporate Volunteer Recognition Campaign

Phoebe McLelland

Recognition of volunteers is a collective challenge to each and every manager of volunteers. To support, enhance, and add a special touch to volunteer recognition, the Corporate Volunteer Committee of the Central Volunteer Bureau of Ottawa-Carleton initiated the Corporate Recognition Campaign. The purpose of this campaign is to encourage employers to recognize volunteers who are their employees. This is accomplished through a process developed by the Corporate Volunteer Committee.

BACKGROUND

The committee grew from its beginning stage as a Task Force of the Training and Education Committee of the Central Volunteer Bureau. The Task Force was established in March 1989 following a panel workshop held January 13, 1989 by the Advanced Education group of managers of volunteers in Ottawa and the surrounding area. Three panelists, representing the Ottawa-Carleton Board of Trade, business, and government was asked to prepare a fifteen-minute presentation in response to the following question:

"How can we effectively structure an organized approach toward linking or matching organizations/agencies involving volunteers with corporations/businesses interested in supporting employee volunteerism?"

The information they provided inspired the formation of the Task Force. It was established under the following mission statement: "To broaden involvement in the community through employee volunteerism and corporate support." Goals of the Task Force included steps to create a bond between the volunteer sector and the corporate or business community within the Ottawa-Carleton area.

Toronto has a Corporate Council model. This was studied by the Ottawa-Carleton Task Force. The Corporate Council was designed to be an informal partnership between the volunteer and business sectors. The unique corporate make-up of Ottawa, Canada's capital, with government being the biggest employer, would result in government being included in this partnership.

The Task Force explored ways to promote volunteerism in the business sector. Strategies included:

1. developing techniques to strengthen the partnership between the non-profit and business sector
2. working with the Ottawa-Carleton Board of Trade businesses, corporations, and other organizations, to identify and match specific and collective partnerships
3. carrying out two or three activities, each year, to promote and encourage volunteering by those working in business.

At the end of its first year of existence, the Task Force evaluated its position with the result that the Task Force became a standing committee of the Central Volunteer Bureau Board, known as the Corporate Volunteer Committee.

DESCRIPTION OF CAMPAIGN

In the spring of 1990 a recognition campaign was planned to recognize employees who volunteer. The purpose of the campaign is to make employers aware of the contribution of their employees to the community and to encourage employers to recognize their employee-volunteers in a special way. As a by-product it was hoped that the employers would provide greater sanctions to volunteering. Some potential benefits to employers might include increased productivity, a good

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image in the community, improved employee morale, and teamwork.

Managers of volunteers throughout the Ottawa-Carleton area read about the proposed recognition campaign in the Central Volunteer Bureau Fall 1990 newsletter. The special recognition was planned to take place during National Volunteer Week, April 21-27, 1991. Information in the newsletter included guidance as to whom to contact at the place of employment of the employee-volunteer so that the appropriate person would be informed of the volunteer's contribution. A sample letter was printed in the newsletter along with the suggested mailing date (see Appendix A). It was recommended that all letters arrive during the week of February 4, 1991 in order to have a greater impact upon the employer who might well have many different employee-volunteers volunteering for many different organizations.

Some concerns were addressed by the Corporate Volunteer Committee.

1. Would an employee wish his/her employer to be informed about his/her volunteer activity? This is a valid concern, therefore, it was recommended that each employee-volunteer be asked if he/she would like to participate.
2. How would a manager of volunteers know if the volunteer is employed? Most manager of volunteers have information on volunteers from such things as applications and interviews.
3. Would it matter if the employee-volunteer is working full-time or part-time? All employee-volunteers working full-time or part-time were eligible to participate.
4. How would the Central Volunteer Bureau know who has been contacted?

Managers of volunteers participating in this campaign were requested to report the names of participating employee-volunteers, and the names and addressed of their employers to the Central Volunteer Bureau. The Central Volunteer Bureau then sent follow-up letters to employers providing suggestions for recognizing the volunteer efforts of the employees. This information was provided in the newsletter.

Once a manager of volunteers decided to participate the following steps were recommended:

1. Identify all employee-volunteers.
2. Contact all employee-volunteers by telephone and ask if they agree to participate.
 - (a) If the volunteer wishes to remain anonymous, he/she is thanked and no further action is taken.
 - (b) If the volunteer agrees to participate, the name and address of the immediate supervisor and the most senior person in the company is obtained.
3. A letter is sent to the most senior person in the employee's company. This is to inform senior management of the valuable activities their employees carry out in the community. A copy of this letter is then sent to the immediate supervisor of the employee-volunteer. Employers are encouraged to recognize not only their identified employee-volunteers but also all their employees who volunteer.
4. A list of all employee-volunteers participating and their respective employers is then sent to the Central Volunteer Bureau.
5. Any feedback from employers giving or employees receiving recognition is documented and shared with the Central Volunteer Bureau so that employers can be identified for their support of employee-volunteers and volunteerism.

RESULTS

In many ways the pilot year of the Corporate Recognition Campaign was a resounding success. Sixteen agencies were involved, 175 employers were contacted on behalf of 193 volunteers. Forty employers participated by recognizing their employee-volunteers. Media coverage was excellent in daily and weekly newspapers, and magazines. Some employee-volunteers received a letter of recognition from their employer. Others were featured in the company newsletter along with a picture of volunteering in progress. Some businesses highlighted volunteerism generally by supporting the efforts of all company

employee-volunteers. All in all it was a win/win situation for employee-volunteers, employers, the agencies, and the hard-working committee.¹

This culminated during National Volunteer Week when the Central Volunteer Bureau held their annual reception at a major downtown hotel, to honor all volunteers. The guest speaker was The Right Honorable Ramon J. Hnatyshyn, Governor General of Canada. He spoke about the dedication of volunteers and especially commended employee-volunteers and the corporate sector's support of volunteerism. A list of businesses that had recognized their employee-volunteers was displayed in a prominent place at the reception.

Employer Newsletter Samples

The following comments were gleaned from the newsletters of employers in recognition of National Volunteer Week through the Corporate Recognition Campaign.

"They're usually modest, maybe even shy about it, but many employees do volunteer work in our community. Their valuable contribution to the quality of life in the region is usually its own best reward. Nonetheless, (employer) would like to recognize employees who serve others on their own time and to bring their cause to light for others who may be interested in joining."

"April 21-28 is National Volunteer Week and to mark it, (employer) would like to publicly recognize the involvement and work of staff members who volunteer in non-profit agencies."

"(Employee-volunteer) is just one of dozens of Ottawa-area business people who devote their time to volunteer work."

Such positive statements about employee-volunteers from their employers give a great boost to employee-volunteers. Volunteerism provides a morale booster to the corporate sector, and often increased productivity is a side benefit.

BENEFITS TO AGENCIES

Participating agencies received recognition for their programs in the media, in

company newsletters, and directly from employers.

The Multiple Sclerosis Society chose to recognize Board and Committee members who are employee-volunteers for this recognition. This resulted in a good feeling among the members of the Board of Directors and presented a high profile of support to this agency. The coordinator of volunteers said, "The effort was worthwhile. I would encourage other agencies to participate. Volunteers felt good about it also." "One volunteer received an award through the Government Department employer because the volunteer contribution became known through this campaign."

The coordinator of Volunteer Services at Elisabeth-Bruyere Health Centre said, "There is no doubt that the process of communicating with so many people has certainly clarified and enhanced the Elisabeth-Bruyere Health Centre's image and role in the community as well as reinforcing the vital role that volunteers play in long-term care by underlining their commitment."

The Director of Volunteer Services at The Royal Ottawa Hospital said, "The employer's perception of the employee was changed by learning of the volunteer contribution of the employee. The employee was now seen as a person who valued his/her community and who was learning and practicing new skills. Employees gained new respect from their employers. Employers and agencies received an increased profile through their cooperation and mutual support. Some employers sent their employees letters, a copy of which was added to their personnel file. There was also a ripple effect as some employers wanted to know how other employees were volunteering in their communities so that they could be recognized as well. Employees appreciated the fact that their employers were interested in their volunteer activities." The employers seem to be saying we appreciate your agency and we support our employee's desire to volunteer.

¹Corporate Recognition Campaign Committee, Paula Agulnik, Pat Francis - Chairperson, Tracey Guilbault, Gilda Good, Lisa Hopkins, Jo Martin, Phoebe McLelland.

LOOKING AHEAD

The Corporate Recognition Campaign made great strides in its first effort. The future provides even greater opportunities. Many volunteers are part of the work force and are volunteering while having heavy demands placed upon their time. They are motivated, as all volunteers are, to make a contribution to the cause or causes of their choice even if it means giving up time which might otherwise be spent relaxing. Employee-volunteers might also be giving up time for which they would otherwise be paid. Special recognition is appropriate for this reason. This does not mean that volunteers should not receive special recognition for other reasons. Everyone is special—especially every volunteer.

What are the possibilities for the future? Perhaps employers will encourage employees to volunteer and provide release time from work. Companies have donated the time of management employees to organizations needing management expertise. Large corporations support worthwhile causes with free advertising, gifts-in-kind, and donations of service.

A Corporate Recognition Campaign is a challenging project, but one which is beneficial to all concerned.

APPENDIX A

Dear (Most Senior Person)

Re: Employee Recognition during National Volunteer Week

As you may be aware (employee-volunteer) has been an active volunteer with (organization) for the past (number of years of service). He/She has greatly contributed to our team as a volunteer. Over the years we have learned that to keep our volunteers, upon whom we depend so much, it is important to recognize the contribution they make to our community.

This year we are writing to their employers to suggest that they also be recognized in their workplace for the community service they provide. In your company a survey might reveal that others in addition to (employee-volunteer) also do volunteer work. May we suggest you hold a small event to honor them during National Volunteer Week April 21-27, 1991. Something as simple as mid-morning coffee and donuts could make a great impact.

Sincerely,

Executive Director

cc: (immediate supervisor of employee-volunteer)

Sampling of Letters from Employers:

"Thank you for your letter regarding the contribution of (employee-volunteer) to your organization as a volunteer.

I have been in touch with (employee-volunteer) to commend this special contribution to the community. Thank you very much for bringing it to my attention."

"Thank you for taking the time to write to us. We are very pleased to hear of the volunteer involvement of (employee-volunteer) with your organization.

Your comment that we should also try to recognize this type of volunteer community involvement is indeed well taken and I will be passing this suggestion on to our Manager, Corporate Communications."

"It is a pleasure to know that (employee-volunteers) of (employer) are valued volunteers at (organization).

The strength of (employer) is its people who strive to make our communities more caring and humane. Acts of sharing and of helping one's neighbor are an integral part of living.

I will be sending (employee-volunteers) letters acknowledging their community volunteer work."

"Thank you for letting us know about the good volunteer work (employee-volunteer) has been doing for your organization. We will certainly feature her in our employee newsletter which is circulated to our 2,200 employees. We regularly recognize volunteers who work on projects such as the annual food drive for the food bank.

While we have no firm idea of how many employees participate as volunteers in the community, we will give a general salute to all volunteers by way of our newsletter.

Thank you for bringing this to our attention."

"This is further to your letter of February 4, 1991 with respect to the National Volunteer Week.

In order to recognize and express our support for National Volunteer Week, and in particular (employee-volunteer's) contributions, I am pleased to inform you, that a get-together will be organized within (employee-volunteer's) Sector. I have also arranged for our section to publicize this throughout the department.

I would like to thank you for bringing (employee-volunteer's) contribution to my attention and please rest assured that the (employer) will annually support National Volunteer Week."