

BROOKINGS

Op-Ed

Corporate Philanthropy 2.0

David L. Caprara and Robert L. Mallett Wednesday, November 28, 2007

A volunteer scientist working to improve patient care in northern Kenya and an accountant building a financial reporting system for a small NGO in Capetown. A doctor assessing training for medical colleagues in Russia and a pharmacist working at a border clinic helping Burmese refugees. An MBA in Rwanda procuring potentially life-saving medicines.

To paraphrase, these are not your grandfather's or your father's volunteers. Instead, they are the faces of a revolution in corporate citizenship — from highly trained and skilled professionals volunteering for company-sponsored and specialized assignments around the world to more localized volunteering programs engaging employees and local volunteers in country.

A decade ago, international corporate volunteering, or ICV, was essentially nonexistent. But the more markets become interconnected, the more that is changing. Today, approximately 40 percent of major corporations have active programs and/or support employee volunteer efforts around the world. According to the U.S. National Council on Workplace Volunteerism, more than 463,000 employees volunteer, giving more than nine million hours of their time in the U.S. and abroad. The change illustrates not just the evolving nature of corporate commitment to local and cross-border development, but also what it takes, when approached strategically, for a global corporation to be both competitive and compassionate in the communities in which they do business.

Validating this conclusion is a recent independent study that examined best practices in the international corporate volunteering field. FSG Social Impact Advisors, at the request of Pfizer and the Brookings Institution, surveyed 25 corporations and found there to be strong benefits from volunteer efforts, including operational and motivational improvements among community members and among company employees who are increasingly a half world away.

Pfizer's experience with its Global Health Fellows in Africa is a good example. Since 2003, more than 128 Fellows have been selected to work with 26 nongovernmental organizations in 31 countries to deliver healthcare and health system support to those in need. The impact of these focused, strategic assignments has been both to increase local system capacity (in this case, health systems) as well as to improve alliances so crucial to tackling serious challenges like HIV/AIDS and malaria.

Pfizer is hardly alone. Becton, Dickinson and Company (BD) found that its volunteering program in Zambia, in collaboration with the Catholic Medical Mission Board, led to enhanced laboratory skills and increased knowledge in the community, as well as increased morale, pride and the development of leadership and teamwork skills among employees.

It goes without saying that skills-based international corporate volunteering provides greatly enhanced benefits to a local community. A London-based Accenture manager volunteered in Tanzania to help college students and the wider community receive relevant job training. Once you consider her adjusted country consulting rate, her volunteer time delivered 10 times the amount of economic value to the community for these services than if she had painted schools. This value-add is a strong argument for corporations to invest in skills-based volunteering and be creative about how they can help communities with the greatest need.

For companies that would like to explore international volunteering opportunities, it is important to keep in mind some of the core lessons learned from the research:

- **Set goals before roles:** International corporate volunteering efforts are more successful when the business objectives have been identified in advance
- **Walk before you run:** Corporations should first decide how to engage local communities where they do business or if they are prepared to start cross-border programs. Before beginning, it is important to consider the company's level of experience with international programs and interest in engaging in a particular country, along with local needs and volunteer capacity generation opportunities
- **Lead with leverage:** Utilizing employees' core skills will have more bang for the buck in the volunteering program
- **Align with philanthropic and corporate social responsibility activities:** Corporate volunteer programs should serve as an extension of a company's other philanthropic initiatives not as a separate effort

- Partner proactively: Companies can save time and resources by partnering with the right organizations, such as a local NGO, to develop a volunteering program.
- Invest in infrastructure: Companies that establish dedicated volunteering program management teams experience more success
- Communicate clearly: Setting clear goals and explaining them to all parties involved will set the right expectations for corporate efforts and also establish a benchmark for measurement

With these lessons in mind, we urge corporate leaders to consider developing or expanding their international volunteer opportunities. A company's greatest asset is always its people. Tap that resource today, and no doubt we can help collectively solve some of the world's most difficult challenges tomorrow.