

Contract Volunteer Services: A Model for Successful Partnership

By Loyce Haran, Siobhan Kenney and Mark Vermilion

Today's workplace has become one of the primary volunteer resources for nonprofit organizations. But hectic employee schedules and lean budgets are often daunting. Sun Microsystems*, a manufacturer of computer workstations based in Mountain View, CA, has found contracts with local Volunteer Centers a valuable way to coordinate corporate volunteer programs.

The Contract Service Advantage

Contracting with a Volunteer Center to coordinate volunteer activities has several advantages from a business standpoint.

First, the company can create a tailored employee volunteer program that reinforces the company's identity among employees and in the community without adding personnel.

Sun Microsystems' contract with its volunteer center partners, for example, specifies that a certain number of individual, small group and large group service opportunities be provided each month. Even in small group and individual activities, Sun's identity is reinforced by use of company T-shirts and banners.

A second advantage: the program can easily be "exported" to wherever the company has a major facility, thus allowing a much greater geographical reach than if there were a single volunteer coordinator trying to service every company site.

Sun currently has volunteer coordination contracts

* Sun Microsystems is a manufacturer of computer workstations based in Mountain View, CA. Loyce Haran is executive director of the Volunteer Center of San Mateo County. Siobhan Kenney is executive director of the Volunteer Exchange of Santa Clara County. Mark Vermilion is director of corporate affairs at Sun Microsystems, Inc. Assisting in the preparation of this article was Cynthia W. Gentry, a public relations specialist at Sun Microsystems.

in the San Francisco Bay area (with two volunteer centers in adjoining counties), in the Merrimack Valley north of Boston, MA, the Surrey Heath district in England and in Scotland's West Lothian district. The coordinators in each contracted volunteer agency reports operationally to his/her executive director and also to Sun's corporate program manager for community volunteer programs.



Sun Microsystems volunteers in Great Britain. From left (standing), Dik Allison, Paul Craddock, Christine Conroy, Sue Goddard, Jane Calveney,, Joy Elliott, Sheila Dyke, Dave Jermy; below, Mark Vermilion, Jane Craddock, Amanda Brown.

Thus, one Sun employee is able to oversee the coordination of more than 1,000 company volunteers.

A third important advantage is the added value that the volunteer center brings to the relationship. The center knows its community's nonprofit groups and needs. It has established databases, professional expertise and rapport with community groups. It is experienced in volunteer



Sun volunteers do restoration on a historic merchant ship at the San Francisco Maritime national Historical Park.

training and coordination—expertise rarely found in most corporations.

Volunteer Center Benefits

A contract to develop and manage a corporate employee volunteer program also benefits the volunteer center. It reinforces the center's role as the focal point of volunteerism within the community. By combining its experience and resources—including established relationships with nonprofit agencies and a database of volunteer jobs—with a corporation's assets—its workforce, commitment to community involvement and financial support—the Volunteer Center can ensure that corporate employees are linked to volunteer positions that meet their interests and skills while addressing critical community needs.

There are financial benefits as well. Many centers lack the funding to address the full volunteer potential of the community. A contract for volunteer coordination services can enhance a center's overall ability to achieve its mission by allowing it to hire a part-or full-time staff person to service the contract. It also results in additional income for overhead and administrative costs. Finally, contract fees help support agency relations and referral systems. The staff person coordinating the corporate program acts as a community relations representative both for the corporation and the Volunteer Center.

Sun Microsystems' Volunteer Center Partnerships

Sun Microsystems' Community Action Volunteer (CAV) program began in 1989 as a component of the company's Corporate Affairs Department. After investigating other corporate volunteer programs and analyzing existing staff resources, responsibilities and experience, the department contracted with the Volunteer Exchange of Santa Clara County and the Volunteer Center of San Mateo County to develop and manage its new program.

The resulting program was so successful that Sun renewed the initial 6-month contract and has now been working with the volunteer centers for over 3 years. Program components include:

- **Staffing:** Each Volunteer Center dedicates one staff member to work a minimum number of hours per week in servicing the contract. At U.S. sites, the staff person devotes at least 20 hours per week; overseas, the time varies according to each site's needs.

- **Advisory Council:** An employee advisory council gives the program its focus and direction. (In the San Francisco Bay area, the council has some 40 members.) At its formation, the council decided the employee volunteer program would address a broad range of service areas—health and human services, hunger and homelessness, education, the arts, and

youth services—to meet the needs and interests of Sun's diverse workforce and of the community.

- **Program Structure:** Sun's CAV program is designed as a "membership" organization. Employees express their interest in volunteering by enrolling in the program. CAV members receive information monthly about volunteer opportunities and are expected to volunteer at least once during the year.

- **Internal Marketing:** To launch the program and create name recognition for CAV among Sun employees, a program emblem was designed and emblazoned on T-shirts, mugs, posters and cafeteria table tents. A brochure, sent to employees' home addresses, informed employees of the program and other corporate affairs initiatives. The T-shirts and mugs have since become recognition items for active CAV members.

- **Volunteer Job Design:** Using the volunteer center's access to community agencies and its ability to identify and develop appropriate volunteer jobs, a monthly bulletin is created and distributed to CAV members. The San Francisco Bay Area bulletin typically lists 15 to 20 volunteer opportunities, including both one-time group projects and ongoing individual positions. Once a quarter, a "Sun-only" project is developed to

engage between 25 and 50 volunteers in a significant activity.

As the CAV program has expanded to meet the needs of the community and the employees, it has become involved in a number of special projects, including several school partnerships, a company-wide AIDS fund-raiser, and a holiday food drive.

■ **Volunteer Recruitment/Referral:**

The monthly CAV bulletin is distributed both by e-mail and in hard copy. CAV members interested in any volunteer position call or e-mail the volunteer center staff person, who is located at the Volunteer Center and linked by modem to Sun's electronic mail system. Volunteer Center staff handles all interviews, referrals, followup and record keeping on Sun employee volunteers.

■ **Recognition:**

In addition to presenting T-shirts and mugs to CAV members, Sun Microsystems hosts an annual gala evening of awards and entertainment.

■ **Evaluation:**

The Volunteer Center CAV coordinator solicits evaluations of volunteer job placements and prepares a monthly focus report outlining program accomplishments. Annual evaluation and planning sessions involve Corporate Affairs staff, CAV coordinators and Volunteer Centers' boards of directors.

Results

More than 1,300 Sun employees worldwide have enrolled in the company's Community Action Volunteer program, which has served 300 community agencies in just over 3 years. Sun Microsystems has been widely recognized for its outstanding community involvement



Sun Microsystems volunteers at a "pond digging" to create a fountain for Pinehurst Resource Centre (for the elderly) in Camberley, Great Britain.

records. Recognition has included an award from the American Red Cross as Corporate Philanthropist of the Year. The Volunteer Centers have developed and successfully marketed this model program to other corporations.

Sun's experience has been that everyone benefits through such a partnership. The company receives volunteer coordination expertise, positive exposure in the community and enthusiastic and appreciative employees. The Volunteer Centers add an easily organized group of volunteers to their rosters and realize financial benefits that allow them to better serve their constituents. Perhaps the biggest winner is the community, which benefits from the talents and energies of a motivated corps of volunteers. ■

TO CHANGE YOUR ADDRESS—USE YOUR LABEL FOR FAST, ACCURATE RESPONSE

Attach
your
label
here

New Address

Name (please print) _____

Address _____

City/State/Zip _____

Return to: Leadership, Circulation, 736 Jackson Place, NW, Washington, DC 20006-4901