

WHY CORPORATIONS SUPPORT EMPLOYEE VOLUNTEERING

From Building Partnerships with Business: A Guide for Nonprofits, a New Resource from VOLUNTEER—The National Center

There are three things you need to know to recruit and retain volunteers from business: (1) why corporations sponsor volunteer programs for their employees; (2) how those programs work; and (3) what you need to do to compete successfully for those volunteers. The following excerpt from VOLUNTEER's new guide, Building Partnerships with Business, focuses on the "why." The 28-page booklet also contains detailed descriptions of corporate volunteer programs—what they are and how they operate—and step-by-step guidance on how to work with corporations.

Building Partnerships with Business is one of a series of products developed by VOLUNTEER through its Workplace in the Community Project, funded by CBS, Inc., Honeywell, Levi Strauss Foundation and the Aetna Life and Casualty Foundation.

The most important and fastest growing source of volunteers in the past five years has been the workplace. Major corporations, small businesses and even public agencies increasingly are undertaking activities that encourage their employees to volunteer and support them in their effort to do so.

In 1985, for example, over 600 major companies sponsored such activities. More than 200 companies reported in VOLUNTEER's 1985 Workplace in the Community survey that almost 300,000 of their workers were active as volunteers. Based on commonly accepted national averages, that could translate into some

50 million hours of community service, worth approximately \$400 million annually.

The roster of "involved companies" ranges from the largest to the smallest on the *Fortune* and *Forbes* lists, from industrial giants to emerging service businesses, from headquarters of multi-nationals to their local outlets. They span virtually all industries: oil, communications, banking and financial services, insurance, chemicals, transportation, retailing, utilities.

Employees are involved in health, education and cultural activities. They work with neighborhood groups, hospitals and recreation centers. They raise money, sit on governing boards, provide management assistance and help provide direct human services. They work from corporate headquarters, from regional offices and from manufacturing facilities.

They include both Hugh Jones, chairman of Barnett Bank of Jacksonville, Florida, who founded the Korean Heart Program there and works individually with children it serves, and Vince Terialles, a cook on an ARCO Marine ship based in Bayport, Texas, who developed and managed a volunteer CPR training program for his local Red Cross.

Some get released time from their jobs to volunteer while others do it on their own time. Some work in teams led by other worker volunteers; some, in group projects managed by their company; others, in individual assignments. A growing number are able to use their volunteer time to obtain cash grants from their companies for the organizations they serve. A few get awards for their work; most do not.

But no matter what the structure of their program, no matter who in the company is involved, one fact remains constant: Volunteers from the workplace provide a significant source of talented, committed, energetic volunteers for the community.

Here is a specific example: In Houston, Tenneco has given priority to the development of business/school partnerships. In the spring of 1981, Tenneco adopted Jeff Davis High School, an inner-city school with a high concentration of economically disadvantaged students. Because of high dropout and absenteeism rates and low composite test scores, Tenneco decided to focus its efforts on the nurturing of positive views of work in general and of business in particular.

Employee volunteers teach and serve as role models, helping to build students' self-confidence and influencing their attitudes toward learning. Tutors assist in everything from math to French, chemistry to drafting.

George Diaz, principal of Jeff Davis, sees the impact of the program this way: "The most important message that comes across from having Tenneco as a partner is the feeling of importance that has been given to students, teachers, administrators and community leaders. The fact that a large corporation like Tenneco would take the time to provide volunteers to an inner-city school proves to teachers and administrators that the business world cares. It says that it cares enough to want to have a stake in the future and well-being of our young people."

Such an impact is felt quite literally every day in communities nationwide as cor-

porations mobilize *their* most important resources, their people, to help solve problems, deliver needed services and improve the quality of life in their communities.

What can *you* get from corporations? The very same resources:

- More people
- Technical skills and professional expertise
- More advocates for your organization and your consumers
- Entry into new networks within the community
- An ongoing relationship with business that can bring you other non-cash resources and maybe even money

Understand the Corporate Rationale for Employee Volunteering

It is critically important for voluntary organizations to understand the rationale for corporate support of employee volunteering. Without this basic understanding, it is impossible to respond adequately to the interests and needs of business in this area.

Employee volunteering is important for three fundamental reasons:

First, employee volunteering is an appropriate and effective tool that corporations can use in meeting their overall economic and social goals and in responding to the expectations of their various constituents or stakeholders.

Second, it is a source of human talent and energy for communities to draw on as they seek solutions to difficult human, social and economic problems. Corporations can and do provide not only willing volunteer hands but also people with specific skills and expertise that may be unavailable from anywhere else.

Third, because the workplace plays a central role in the lives of most Americans, corporations can support and encourage volunteering as one of the ways in which individuals can help themselves, as well as others, throughout their lives. Doing so is not only the morally correct position for corporations but also one that will benefit them by strengthening their workforce.

Corporate leaders have discovered that employee volunteer programs are *tools*:

- To respond to the expectations of their own workers, the public, and the government that they will become involved in community problem-solving
- To address the interests of their multiple constituencies, including their shareholders

- To build a loyal, productive and participating workforce

- To create healthy communities in which to live and do business

- To demonstrate the moral courage and leadership that builds public respect and enhances marketing of products and services

From their discovery the following rationale for employee volunteering has evolved:

1. Volunteer programs are a way for corporations to respond to workers' concerns about the quality of life in their working and living environments.

2. Volunteer programs are a way to in-

Employees are involved in health, education and cultural activities. They work with neighborhood groups, hospitals and recreation centers. They raise money, sit on governing boards, and provide management assistance.

crease and reinforce workers' skills, particularly in leadership and participatory decision-making.

3. Volunteer programs are a way for business to respond affirmatively to the public's expectation of its involvement in community problem-solving.

4. Volunteer programs are a way for corporations to demonstrate moral leadership, "doing the right thing," which redounds to the ultimate benefit of the company.

- **Volunteer programs are a way for corporations to respond to workers' concerns about the quality of life in their working and living environments.**

John Naisbitt writes in *Re-inventing the Corporation*, "The corporation's competitive edge is people—an educated, skilled work force that is eager to develop its human potential while contributing to the organization's growth."

In practical terms, that means that corporations must respond to the interests, needs and concerns of their workers in order to attract and retain the best possible employees.

Cornell Maier, chairman and chief executive of Kaiser Aluminum and Chemical, captured the essence of the issue in a 1985 speech at the Minnesota Keystone Awards program. He said, "The quality of life is what helps us attract, and keep, valued employees. Our employees all have lives of their own, aspirations and desires outside the confines of their offices and work stations. They want to live in healthy, vibrant communities, with happy, productive friends and neighbors."

Employee volunteer programs are an obvious kind of nonwork activity that can contribute to both aspects of corporate efforts to address worker concerns about the quality of life: for the workers as individuals and in the community in which they live. As Allstate Insurance Chairman and CEO Donald Craib has said, volunteer programs "acknowledge that people want to identify with their institutions, and they provide that opportunity in a wholly positive context."

There are practical benefits to corporations of the good feelings and sense of connection that come from volunteering. Those benefits are reflected repeatedly by middle managers who find that *workers using released time for volunteering are more productive and have a lower rate of absenteeism than those who are not involved.*

Workplace-based volunteering recognizes and reinforces the importance of unpaid, helping work in our lives. It offers additional opportunities to provide in all ways for ourselves and our families, to contribute to our community and to grow personally and professionally. Participation in helping and problem-solving activities is an empowering experience, reminding each of us of our power to make a difference in the lives of others and in the quality of life of our community. Empowered people who believe in themselves contribute to high productivity and success in a business environment.

As James Kettelsen, chairman and CEO of Tenneco, has said, "Pride in what the company does creates pride in a per-

son's job—and builds more effective productivity on the job. The pursuit of excellence in work and quality of life is long and challenging. Fulfilling one's potential is equally difficult, but as a corporation and as a group of caring, sharing people, we're trying and we're succeeding on both counts."

■ **Volunteer programs are a way to increase and reinforce workers' skills, particularly in leadership and participatory decision-making.** A 1982 survey by the New York Stock Exchange found that 41% of companies with more than 500 employees had worker-management participation programs. Facts such as these have led Arnold Brown and Edith Weiner to conclude, in *Super-Managing* that, "The 1980s will mark the first decade of widespread employee participation in decisions regarding job design, work schedules, intercompany relations, and goal setting."

Such a dramatic shift will not be made painlessly, either on the part of the individual workers or those who must manage them and simultaneously change the style of their management. Indeed, it is most likely to be those middle-level managers who have the most difficulty making the change.

Volunteer programs offer an excellent opportunity for some employees to gain the leadership and participation experience they need to work effectively in the new business environment of worker participation in planning and decision-making. Similarly, they offer middle managers the opportunity to participate in work situations with employees that are more collaborative than hierarchical, helping them to become comfortable with the desired new forms of workplace interactions.

One example of how this happens is the "involvement team" approach to employee volunteering. Typically, involvement teams will include a true cross-section of employees, with janitors, machine operators, supervisors, secretaries and computer programmers working side by side to identify needs within the community, to determine how best the team (and, by extension, the company) can respond, and to plan and implement specific projects that most often will involve employees beyond those who are team members as volunteers.

Distinctions between managers and non-managers are at worst blurred and usually invisible. The team works under the leadership of a chairperson who is as likely to be a line worker as a supervisor.

At Federal Express, the impact of volunteering on skills has been expressed somewhat differently, but no less compellingly. There, the company has identified eight managerial skills that it believes are important to its work. They are: teamwork, ability to motivate others, organization, leadership, listening, decision-making, speaking and writing.

In a recent survey of employees who volunteer through the company's Corporate Neighbor Team, over 40% of the respondents indicated that they had gained skills from their volunteering in seven of the eight areas. Positive ratings ranged from a low of 43% for speaking to 67% for

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teamwork. Between 53% and 57% responded positively about leadership, organization and ability to motivate others.

Barbara Ragland, senior manager of community service for Federal Express, says of the survey results, "The degree of time and effort contributed to the teams is perceived to rate proportionately to personal career development and productivity. The program actually provides leadership opportunities for some that they would not otherwise have in their Federal Express work experience. For these employees, team leadership experience is seen as contributing to job satisfaction."

■ **Volunteer programs are a way for**

business to respond affirmatively to the public's expectation of its involvement in community problem-solving.

The expectations the public holds about the responsibility of business to participate in the total life of the community are increasingly clear. They are typified by polls such as a 1981 Harris survey that concluded Americans, by approximately a three-to-one margin, felt corporations were doing less than they should in the areas of unemployment, education, and aid to the handicapped, elderly and poor.

Nor are such expectations limited to the general public. One of the four basic convictions on which Honeywell has built its social responsibility program is that "Honeywell employees expect their company to act responsibly in community matters and to play an active part in social concerns."

One benefit of giving leadership to the community is that it will help develop greater public support for business and in the process can help create an atmosphere in which business can prosper. Or, stated from the negative, doing so can help fend off unwanted pressures from government and the public. Another of Honeywell's four basic convictions, for example, is, "In order to avoid unwarranted business regulation, Honeywell should address social change and business responsibilities before government is forced to act."

For most companies, community relations activities traditionally have consisted of the contribution of cash or products. But, the mobilization of employees as volunteers will have an even greater impact—on both the community and the company—than the act of putting a check in an envelope.

Says James F. Beré, chairman and CEO of Borg-Warner, "It has always been easier to make out a check than to become personally involved Yet, just giving money without direct involvement does not meet the true test of social responsibility. We must become genuine volunteers—individuals helping other individuals—to effectively meet this critical social need, taking on one problem at a time, winning one battle at a time."

George Romney, chairman of VOLUNTEER, has made this point repeatedly: The basis of the relationship between corporations and communities is the recognition that while the corporations have the human and financial resources the community needs, the community conversely has the political power to provide the envi-

ronmental support the corporation requires. "There can be no better way to realize that," he says, "than by the active involvement of corporate employees in all aspects of community life."

■ **Volunteer programs are a way for corporations to demonstrate moral leadership, "doing the right thing," which redounds to the ultimate benefit of the company.** James O'Toole, author of *Vanguard Management*, asked several executives about their companies' policies and programs of social responsibility. Their replies are well worth repeating here in their entirety:

When I asked Walter A. Haas, Jr. . . . what the rationale was for forming [Levi's Community Involvement Teams], he said, "It was simply the right thing to do." When I asked Jan Erteszek why he believed that every one of his "associates" had a right to share in Olga Company's profits and ownership, he answered: "Because it is the morally right thing to do." And when Honeywell's James Renier was asked why he stayed with the goal of participation through ten years of less-than-enthusiastic support from his fellow managers, he replied: ". . . It would be worth doing simply because it is the right thing to do."

O'Toole argues that corporations not only have an affirmative obligation to do good, but that they are better for having accepted it. It is, he writes, "the key trait of moral leadership . . . [that] separates the eminent from merely very good corporations."

It is this possibility of accomplishment that gives "doing the right thing" its ultimate benefit. But there are very pragmatic business benefits as well. O'Toole writes that in doing the right thing, business leaders "lay the foundation for the continued survival of corporate capitalism." And Allstate Chairman Don Craib says that when corporations "help to improve social conditions, they are working to enhance their own profits as well. In the long run, the economic and social well-being of our communities assures the well-being of our corporations."

James E. Burke, chairman of Johnson & Johnson, echoes this: "Most successful corporations in this country are driven by a simple moral imperative to serve the public better than the competition does. There's an important correlation, in my way of thinking, between a corporation's public responsibility and its ultimate financial performance. Although public service is implied in the charter of all American companies, public responsibility—in reality—is a company's very rea-

son for existing."

Doing the right thing through employee volunteer programs has the added attraction that it encourages and supports workers in doing the right thing in their personal lives, contributing in a positive way to others and to their communities. Who among us would not have it said of us, "He or she did the right thing . . . and helped others to do it as well."

It is clear, then, that employee volunteering is a "win-win" situation, benefiting the community, the individuals who volunteer and the corporation itself. Volunteer managers are familiar with this mutual benefit approach to volunteering, recognizing that individuals who volunteer are meeting their own needs as well as responding to the needs of others. Volunteering thus becomes a dynamic relationship, in which the lines between giving and taking are constantly blurred.

We in the volunteer community have become increasingly comfortable with this philosophy and have successfully built our volunteer programs on it. It is only a small step, then, to recognize that institu-

tions, like individuals, have needs that can be met through volunteering.

George Moody, president of Security Pacific Corporation and chairman of the board of the American Red Cross, perhaps best and most directly captured this when he said, "By providing volunteer programs, we enable community organizations to receive needed assistance and enrichment while our people develop skills and receive great personal satisfaction through helping others. This winning combination makes good, sound business sense."

Voluntary organizations that want to compete successfully for corporate volunteer resources must be equally prepared to exercise "good, sound business sense" by preparing themselves to respond to the needs and concerns of the corporations from which those volunteers come.

Building Partnerships with Business: A Guide for Nonprofits is available for \$9.95 + \$2.50 postage/handling from Volunteer Readership, 1111 N. 19th St., Suite 500, Arlington, VA 22209.

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