



# Engaging Corporate Volunteers

In your non-profit organisation.

*Corporate volunteering is any action by an employer to encourage and support the volunteer involvement of their employees in the community, whether during work hours or in employees' own time.*

Corporate volunteering, or employer-supported volunteering, is gaining popularity in Ireland, with more and more companies recognizing their responsibilities to their stakeholders and the impact they can have on the local community through their Corporate Social Responsibility practices. Volunteering provides a great platform to engage staff with the non-profit community, which can benefit the employee, employer, the volunteer-involving organisation, and of course, society.

### What's in it for non-profit organisations?

Corporate Volunteering opens up a pool of willing recruits who are not only looking for ways to be meaningfully involved in their communities but are being actively encouraged to do so by their employers. Their employees are facilitated in their volunteering as part of specific employer-endorsed volunteering programmes or by allowing them to volunteer on company time. Corporate volunteering also offers non-profit organisations the opportunity to:

- Acquire new energy, ideas and enthusiasm for projects and tasks.
- Access professional skills, expertise and resources.
- Raise the profile of your group's activities and services.
- Build valuable relationships and explore the potential for long-term partnerships.

### What can corporate volunteers do?

There are many examples of activities corporate volunteers could do, depending on what they have to offer and what a non-profit needs. A human resources professional might help a non-profit develop an employee handbook, a Public Relations specialist might help create a new communications strategy to enhance the organisation's profile. A programmer might volunteer in computer clubs to teach kids the basics of coding. A team might build an educational play area in a community crèche.

### Skill-based volunteering and corporate volunteering

Rather than engaging in hands-on or practical activities, skills-based or skills-sharing volunteers share their professional or technical knowledge and expertise to benefit local non-profit organisations. In this way, non-profits can use existing financial resources for more fundamental aspects of their work instead of paying for consultancy or professional fees.



It's a win-win partnership, as skill-based volunteers have an opportunity to enhance their own skills, possibly gain experience in mentoring others and have the satisfaction of completing tasks for organisations for which they would normally need to pay consultants.

Volunteers with professional or technical skills can choose to volunteer in a personal capacity on their own time or may also have the support of their employer.

Why should a company choose skill-sharing activities rather than more traditional hands-on volunteering? The volunteer contribution to the non-profit may be more meaningful, often providing an outcome that is lasting in its impact. The work may also be more meaningful to the employee, tapping into skills they are uniquely qualified to offer.

5:1

The impact of skills-based volunteerism over traditional, hands-on volunteerism.

2013 Millennial Impact Report

## Are corporate volunteers different to your regular volunteers?

In a lot of ways, corporate volunteers are just like any other volunteer that you engage with – they need the same orientation, supervision, resources and support to help them be effective in their role. But there are some things about corporate volunteers that need a bit more attention.

Be prepared to explain some things that the corporate volunteer may not know to enable them to adjust their expectations to meet yours.

Explain:

- what makes a non-profit like yours different from a for-profit business
- who your service users / clients are and what they bring to the organisation (assets and challenges)
- the history of the need they will be addressing
- what resources you have (or don't have) to help them
- the decision-making process in your organisation – who, how, and how long it takes



Companies that release staff to volunteer do so at a cost to their own business. So be prepared to act in a business-like manner that allows the volunteer to complete their task as efficiently as possible. Ensure appropriate resources are allocated to the project and all necessary preparation is completed before the volunteer commences.

From the beginning, have a well-written role profile that highlights defined tasks, mutual expectations, standards, and support mechanisms. Agree on deliverables, task deadlines, and indicators for success.

Consider how you will communicate and how often, especially if the volunteer is working remotely.



### Don't assume that the volunteer..

...has any experience of being a volunteer or knows how a non-profit organisation works. Volunteering at work is for some people their first experience of volunteering and of the Community & Voluntary sector.

...is automatically qualified to help your organisation and will be a good match, just because they are employed by a company. You still need to meet them to assess suitability, particularly for skilled tasks.

...has easily transferable skills that can be applied in your organisation or that they are open to adapting the way they do things to take account of your organisation's needs and limitations.

...only wants to do their day job – ask if there is something else they can offer or they want to experience.

...can access and donate their company's goods or money. Welcome them for their skills and energy, and not for whatever financial persuasion you think they might have. At the same time, don't be reluctant to ask if their business is willing to help in a tangible way – perhaps provide colour copies of your brochures, occasional meeting rooms etc.

## How to involve corporate volunteers in your organisation

Involving corporate volunteers successfully in your volunteer programme requires an investment of both time and resources, to plan and execute, but it can also reap significant rewards for your organisation. Follow these 6 steps for success.



Thinking ahead about involving employee volunteers is essential. Consider what the organisation is hoping to achieve, assess whether it is worth an additional investment of resources, and if you have the support of others in the organisation.

Your organisation needs to be very clear why you are planning to engage corporate volunteers. Is it to:

- Bring additional benefits through corporate employee involvement?
- Develop your own employees' skills or increase your capacity?
- Create better networks with staff, clients and partner organisations?
- Enhance the public perception of your organisation?
- Source additional funding?

Although corporate volunteers are a very useful resource, they are certainly not the only ones. It is important for the senior leadership or Board of Directors to fully support the introduction of a corporate volunteer strategy. Careful planning with existing staff and volunteers will assist both in the support needed and the development of new opportunities for growth. Initially, this will involve change and create additional work but over time the benefits should far outweigh the challenges. Are you committed to putting in the required time and other resources, and to being creative about possible new ways of doing things?



A reactive approach to corporate volunteers can result in taking on corporate volunteers for the sake of it and having them do tasks that don't really need to be done. Pro-active organisations identify and create suitable projects or opportunities before a company approaches them.

Brainstorm with all staff to identify and design "employee volunteer roles" that add value to your organisation and enhance your service delivery. Consider your annual work plan, and which activities will need expertise or additional supports. Look at what professional expertise you paid for last year.

Consider obvious opportunities within the following areas; communication, finance, research, strategic planning, HR, project management, IT, marketing. In addition look at the tasks that you never get around to doing – can corporate volunteers help?



- ✓ Allocate sufficient time to design and plan tasks.
- ✓ Determine how you will measure the success of your programme.
- ✓ Ensure you have enough resources to supervise volunteers/volunteer teams.
- ✓ For team events, assess the costs versus the benefits of the activity (materials, staff time, lunch etc.). You may find that the cost is simply too much for your organisation to bear alone so factor in a donation to cover costs.

Prepare

Establish

Design

Manage

Evaluate

Maintain



## Volunteer Opportunities

Think about the volunteer opportunities you can offer that will attract employees and employers. Well-designed, and well-articulated roles are more likely to lead to a more rewarding and valuable outcome. Consider the time requirement needed from the employee volunteers and think “outside the box” to make it attractive, flexible and realistic for employee volunteers. Organisations should try to offer a variety of volunteering opportunities that can be undertaken at different times. Think of indoor & outdoor activities, once-off and on-going, skilled and non-skilled, individual and team, whole day or part day tasks.

When designing appropriate roles or project descriptions, consider the questions that a prospective company partner might ask you:

- What sort of volunteers do you need?
- What type of tasks could they do?
- What skills are needed, how much time will it take, and where will the tasks be based?
- What benefits will it bring to both organisations?

## Tips for designing new opportunities...

- Prepare a full information brief of the opportunity which includes details of :
  - Your organization and its impact
  - The tasks needed to be done & skills required for the work
  - A clear sense of the time and/or total hours necessary
  - Any additional resources that the company may be required to provide
  - Why the work is vital, or the difference it will make to your clients.
- Have a menu of opportunities if possible so companies or skilled volunteers can choose to take on only those tasks that they can realistically achieve.
- Take into consideration that some volunteers can only volunteer during work hours due to employer insurance restrictions or company policy.
- Be specific about the needs to be met and the time commitments involved. Don't forget to mention additional requirements, such as Garda Vetting checks, qualifications, etc.
- For team projects, ensure you have a facility that can accommodate the number of volunteers you need, and keep the tasks flexible enough to take account of last minute changes in volunteer numbers.
- Ensure the work you ask employee volunteers to do is achievable and has clear outputs. This needs to be communicated directly from the outset on the 'opportunity profile', so to attract the right person or team with the right skills and resources who can do the right job for you. Think about how to make a volunteering project more meaningful for the volunteer.
- Outline the benefits both the volunteers and their company can gain from the experience, including any skills development such as project management, leadership or communication skills.
- Consider your capacity and how you will work with volunteers throughout the life of the project. Ensure that you have a contact person from your organisation that will be able to deal with enquiries, someone who can coordinate the volunteers and the means to brief and support volunteers so they know what to do.



A volunteer-friendly organisation will be in a good position to include employee volunteers. Before engaging with companies, ensure you have a successful experience of working with ‘ordinary’ volunteers. Have policies and procedures in place for recruitment, screening, selection, induction, training, supervision, support, recognition and evaluation. You can then adapt these, if necessary, for employee volunteers.

Managing volunteers well is important in making the most of their time and skills, and to ensure a long running relationship with your partner organisation. The following tips will help:

- Welcome the volunteers when they arrive. Take the time to show them around and introduce them to everyone. Make sure they know who they should contact if they have any questions or suggestions.
- Prepare an appropriate orientation for the volunteers including health & safety information instruction.
- Offer training and support. Employee volunteers may bring particular skills, but they are unlikely to have experience of your sort of work, so they will need some guidance. On-going support should also be available.
- Make sure that your staff working with the volunteers are briefed on supporting the volunteers, including guiding them on any relevant safety procedures.
- Say thank you – both to the individual volunteers and to the organisation involved.

## Tips for managing volunteer teams doing “hands-on” practical activities

- ✓ Check all tools needed are available and in working order and that your first aid kit is complete and easily accessible.

- ✓ Discuss the materials that need to be purchased with the company and determine who will be responsible for ordering and paying for materials.

- ✓ If engaging teams, discuss and negotiate with the employer any costs that may occur as a result of hosting the team.

- ✓ It's not unreasonable to ask groups to pay a fee to cover these costs, so long as you are transparent about what these costs are.

- ✓ Confirm that you are properly insured and ask the Team Leader to check their company's position regarding cover and liability.



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Employers and your Board need to be convinced on an on-going basis that the employer-supported volunteering programme is worthwhile, so from the outset decide together what feedback is necessary, and keep them informed of the programmes progress and challenges.



Always tell the volunteers and their employer how their volunteering has helped you. If they do not know whether they are making a difference they may not continue. Get feedback from the volunteers on their experience - many times the company will do their own evaluation so ask for a copy of it. Ask your own staff and regular volunteers how the collaboration went and if anything can be improved on.

Review all of the feedback and suggest improvements for future employee engagements. Provide honest feedback to the company and volunteers including any challenges or highlights, and invite them to make suggestions for improvement if necessary. Share this review with your Board to ensure their

continued support.

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Successful corporate volunteering requires a considerable investment of resources so it is very important that relationships with companies and their volunteers are viewed as long-term, even if the relationships starts off with an ad-hoc or once off activity. You are likely to get much more out of the relationship with both the company and the volunteers if you take the trouble to sustain it. To maintain the relationships, it is helpful to;

- Send a Thank You card or letter to the CEO and Team leader and explain how they have helped your organisation.
- Send photos to local press or put an article on your website, social media, newsletters etc.
- Send updates on how your work is going – e.g. newsletters or your annual report.
- Offer to visit the company to outline how your work is going.
- Acknowledge their support in your annual report or in any relevant press release, online or social media post and send them a copy.
- Publicise the partnership internally and externally.

Below are useful guides to support collaboration with companies:

### [10 Steps for Collaborating with Companies](#)

Interested in developing a mutually-beneficial group volunteer project with a company but don't know where to start? These 10 Steps will help your organisation prepare for successful collaborations.

### [A practical toolkit for introducing employee volunteering in your organisation](#)

This Workbook is designed to help volunteer-involving organisations implement employee volunteering projects. It is useful for organisations that are ready to start their first projects and have already agreed internally that corporate volunteering has the potential to help them to meet their objectives and bring added value to their work.

### [How to Create an Information Pack for Corporate Supporters](#)

Is your organisation keen to tap into the resources and benefits that partnering with a company can provide? This checklist highlights what you should include in your information pack to attract the right corporate partner for your organisation.

## Safety of Corporate Volunteers

Whatever the type of activities that employer-supported volunteers do, all have health & safety issues that need to be addressed. This is especially true for employees participating in short term, once-off or team volunteering opportunities, those who will volunteer in a different location or where volunteers can't receive the same amount of advance training as a long-term volunteer.

It is important to be aware of key responsibilities to ensure a safe and productive environment for all employees that volunteer in employer-endorsed volunteering activities.

### Who is responsible for corporate volunteer's safety?

There are three key stakeholders who are involved in ensuring safety during employee volunteering activities – the non-profit organisation (host), employee, and employer. Employers in Ireland have a duty of care to their employees under both common law and under the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act, 2005 and this duty extends to staff volunteering initiatives and activities undertaken away from the normal place of work.

This duty includes the obligation to provide a safe place of work, safe systems of work, training and instruction in relation to health and safety and reporting accidents and dangerous occurrences.

An employer must do whatever is reasonably practicable to ensure the safety, health and welfare at work of his or her employees.

### Best Practise when organising an employee volunteering activity

**Risk Assessment** - Assess the possible risk to employee volunteers of every task that an employee may undertake when volunteering.

**Training** - The outcome of this assessment will determine what training or instructions may be necessary for employees in respect of the duties that they will be undertaking to ensure a safe environment.

**Insurance** - Both the employer and host should check its insurance cover to determine if it covers volunteering activities and what activities are included or excluded.

**Agreement** – an agreement should be completed between the employer and the host organisation to include (among other things) training requirements, and safety responsibilities.

#### KEY SAFETY PRINCIPLES

- IDENTIFY HAZARDS
- MANAGE HAZARDS
- SAFETY INSTRUCTIONS
- EMERGENCIES
- HEALTH & SAFETY POLICY
- TRAINING

<b>Host</b>	knows best the tasks and work environment, so holds prime responsibility to ensure health & safety for volunteers. It can identify and communicate potential health & safety issues, and the skills and experience required to undertake the work.
<b>Employer</b>	The employer needs to be fully informed about the legal and insurance issues associated with volunteering. It also needs to ensure its employees are aware of their responsibility for their own safety (and that of others) when volunteering.
<b>Employee</b>	Have a responsibility for their own safety including obtaining and following the particular health and safety requirements of the project.





Volunteer Ireland is the national volunteer development agency in Ireland.

Our vision is to connect people with one another enabling community participation that builds a better Irish society. Our mission is to increase the quality of volunteering in Ireland through inspiring, supporting and facilitating volunteering at every level.

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