

4. Volunteers

4.20 Employer Supported Volunteering



Introduction

There is a growing interest in community investment programmes and more encouragement from government for companies and public sector organisations to support their local communities. Employer-supported volunteering is just one way of doing this alongside other such initiatives e.g. charity of the year fundraising and donations, payroll giving and providing meeting rooms and other gifts in kind to third sector groups.

There are many types of employer-supported volunteering (ESV) programmes to assist employees to volunteer, both in their own time and in work time.

Different approaches to ESV

Different employers will choose different approaches (or a combination of approaches) to support their staff to volunteer depending on their organisational culture and business needs. Some different approaches are described below. All are valuable but are very different types of volunteering.

- **Using professional skills**

Offering your professional skills to a third sector organisation can be a great help to that organisation. Volunteers can get involved and resource valuable and developmental projects. Whilst providing the volunteer with a meaningful experience which can enhance their skills and understanding of the third sector or interest group, the receiving project has an appropriately skilled person to work on important projects they may otherwise not be able to resource. Potential projects could include feasibility studies, community consultations, marketing plans or event planning.

- **One-off team events**

A team volunteering event is a task organised in partnership with a third sector organisation or a school or hospital which is usually very practical and can accommodate a group of people. These can be quite traditional e.g. painting and decorating, gardening or conservation and environmental activities. Less traditional activities might include e.g. building and testing emergency shelters which will be used in disaster zones, organising an 'introduction to the workplace' day for students with a sight impairment or organising a range of fundraising activities for a charity. These types of activities always benefit the receiving organisation in terms of a real project being undertaken and completed and the individuals making up the teams also reap rewards. Benefits described by team

members and employers are often the team-building element and increase in motivation. Team volunteering can also encourage individuals to volunteer and so is a good introduction to those who have never volunteered before.

- **Mentoring**

There are many established mentoring schemes which require volunteers. These include schemes working with offenders, unemployed/economically inactive people, young people starting up in business and in schools. This helps volunteers to develop their coaching and listening skills and can have a huge benefit on the people the volunteers work with.

- **Board membership**

Volunteers can serve on boards of schools, public involvement projects or on the management committee of a third sector organisation. Board membership provides the opportunity to apply the skills and experience gained to a totally new environment and context. Being a trustee can also help build social contacts, broaden experience or get someone involved in something completely new.

Business case

Many employers have found that supporting their staff to volunteer has benefits for all concerned:

- **Benefits to the community**

- Skills and resources of employees can help to support projects and initiatives
- Increase in the pool of volunteers available
- Building links between the employer and the community

- **Benefits to the employee**

- Employees can use their existing skills to support a community project
- They can also develop new skills and have different experiences
- Have the opportunity to perform a wider range of tasks than they have in the workplace
- New experiences and meeting new colleagues/contacts
- Better understanding of a related/client sector

- **Benefits to the employer**

- Improved relationships with stakeholders, the local community and the wider community
- Motivated employees and improved work performance
- Opportunities for training and development outside of what is usually offered
- Fun way to develop staff and teams
- Good PR, maintaining a positive brand image

Issues to consider

Employer supported volunteering programmes need to suit the business needs and requirements of your organisation, some key issues to consider are described below:

- **Paid time off**

Some employers will offer time off to their staff to get involved in voluntary activities. Other employers will not be in a position to offer this. Whatever the organisation decides it is helpful to have a policy to make clear what the arrangements are for time off to volunteer. For example do you:

- offer x number of days paid special leave per year to allow staff to volunteer
- ask staff to match their volunteering time e.g. one hour of their own time and one hour of paid time off
- encourage staff to volunteer but cannot offer paid time off so staff will need to volunteer in the evening or at weekends or book annual leave, or to make use of flexi- time arrangements

- **Insurance and health and safety**

Employer supported volunteers are covered by employment law when volunteering on an employer supported project (including off-site and out-of-hours volunteering). Employers have a 'duty of care' to reduce the likelihood of employees being harmed as a result of their volunteering activities. Employers will need to ensure that their insurance policy covers employees volunteering outside of their usual workplace.

All volunteering activities will need to be risk assessed. If you are working with a partnership organisation which arranges an activity for your staff, you need to ensure that the organisation carries out the risk assessment for you. Depending on your insurance arrangements you may also need to carry out a risk assessment.

For more detailed information about health and safety and risk assessment visit [Volunteering England's ESV website](#)

- **Recognition**

Recognition of the contribution that volunteers make can take different forms. Some employers award certificates, feature stories about volunteers in internal and external communication, hold volunteering awards or offer letters of thanks. This kind of recognition will show volunteers that they are appreciated and can serve to encourage others to get involved.

Some volunteers may not want too much public appreciation and so it is vital to check with the individuals concerned. Employers must also take care that they are recognising only volunteering that is employer-supported; some individuals who volunteer in their own time will not feel it is any of their employer's business to celebrate their achievements.

Further information/links

You can contact your local Volunteer Centre to find out more about individual volunteering opportunities in your area. You will find their contact details on <http://www.volunteering-wales.net/volunteercentres.html>

You can also browse individual volunteering opportunities on www.volunteering-wales.net

Volunteering England has an ESV section on their website with comprehensive information about employer supported volunteering, including a guide to setting up a scheme:

<http://www.volunteering.org.uk/WhatWeDo/Projects+and+initiatives/Employer+Supported+Volunteering/Employers/>

Business in the Community has information on the website in relation to employer supported volunteering in Wales:

http://www.bitc.org.uk/wales/what_we_do/community/employee_volunteering/index.html

The Welsh Government has a 'Guide to employee volunteering in the public sector' which you can find on this link:

<http://wales.gov.uk/topics/housingandcommunity/voluntarysector/employee/gettinginvolved/?lang=en>

Disclaimer

The information provided in this sheet is intended for guidance only. It is not a substitute for professional advice and we cannot accept any responsibility for loss occasioned as a result of any person acting or refraining from acting upon it.

For further information contact

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