



## Employee Volunteering – Connecting Companies to Communities

Is your nonprofit organization struggling to find suitable volunteers? Have you considered approaching businesses in your community? Apart from financial support, businesses can provide nonprofit organizations with access to many valuable resources such as in-kind donations, facilities and, of course, volunteers. Employee volunteers will often have specialized skills (e.g., accounting, law, computing) that nonprofits urgently need. Partnering with companies to engage their

employees as volunteers will also help strengthen businesses' connections to their local communities.

This bulletin highlights several information resources recently published by the Knowledge Development Centre on the topic of employee volunteering. These resources can help you work with businesses in your community to involve employee volunteers.

*"These are very qualified people. They have a lot to offer."*

## How do companies support employee volunteers?

Knowing the types of supports that companies provide to employee volunteers is the first step to working effectively with business. M. Easwaramoorthy and Cathy Barr from Imagine Canada teamed up with Mary Runte and Debra Basil from the University of Lethbridge to conduct a national survey to understand how private businesses in Canada support employee volunteerism. The survey was conducted in 2005 and involved a random sample of almost 1,000 businesses. Businesses of all types and sizes and from all areas of the country participated in the survey. The results are presented in a report entitled *Business support for employee volunteers in Canada: Results of a national survey*.

Based on the survey results, the authors offer recommendations for businesses, nonprofit organizations, and governments interested in improving the effectiveness of corporate volunteer initiatives in Canada.

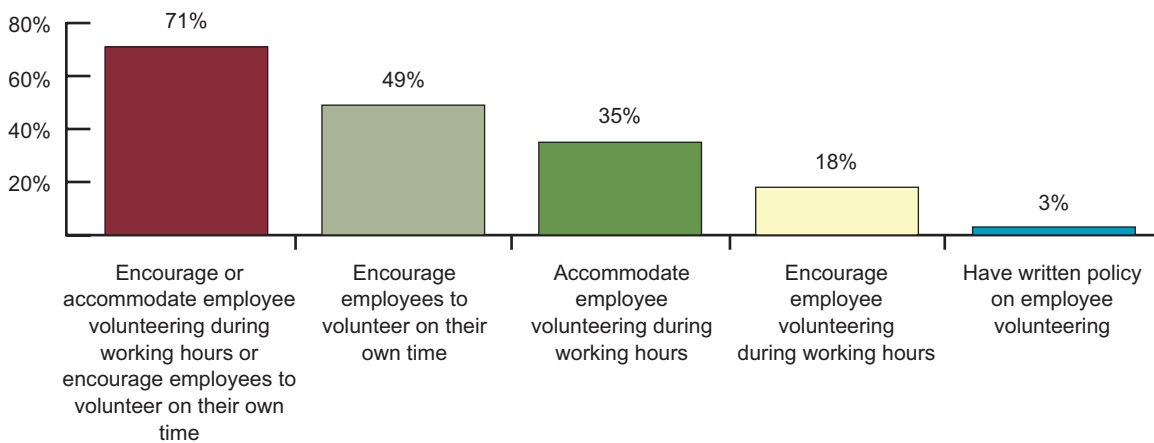
The recommendations for nonprofit organizations include:

- Collaborate with businesses to provide meaningful opportunities for employee volunteers.
- Recognize the less obvious supports provided by businesses to employee volunteers (e.g., adjustments to working hours or access to company facilities or equipment).
- Develop strategies to accommodate volunteers who are only available outside of regular working hours.

*"I had to leave early for my volunteer work and I would just rearrange my day and start earlier to make up for the time."*

*"My employer thought it was a great thing. I would have to leave early on Friday afternoons to make my shift and there was no hesitation in letting me go early. I didn't have to make up the time."*

## Percentage of companies supporting employee volunteering



## What motivates employees to volunteer?

Understanding the motivations of employee volunteers can help you recruit and retain these volunteers. Evelina Rog, Mark Pancer, and Mark Baetz (Wilfrid Laurier University) conducted interviews with over 100 employees of the Ford Motor Company of Canada. About half the interviewees had participated in Ford's corporate volunteer program and half had not. Their report, entitled *Corporate volunteer programs: Maximizing employee motivation and minimizing barriers to program participation*, offers the following recommendations for improving participation rates:

- Create positive attitudes towards volunteering by explaining the benefits.
- Make the program as appealing as possible; time off work is a major motivator.
- Provide interesting and meaningful volunteer opportunities; offer lots of choice.
- Make it easy for employees to volunteer and support their efforts.
- Build on personal and co-worker support for volunteering by, for example, providing group volunteer opportunities.
- Try to ensure that employees have a positive experience and recognize them for their contributions.

In a related study, John Pelozo (Haskayne School of Business, University of Calgary) interviewed 29 employees from nine different companies that operate employee volunteer programs and conducted an online survey that was completed by over 400

employees of 10 other companies. *Intra-organizational volunteerism: A manual for creating internal marketing programs to recruit employee volunteers* discusses the results of this study and provides practical suggestions for companies and nonprofit organizations wishing to improve participation in corporate volunteer programs. Pelozo identifies five reasons people participate in these programs:

1. the egotism motive – to gain personal benefits (e.g., meet new people, learn new things)
2. the organizational citizenship motive – to demonstrate support for their employer
3. the altruism motive – to help others
4. the ability to volunteer on company time
5. pressure from peers

His analysis indicates that the first two factors have the largest positive impact on participation in employee volunteer programs. Pelozo recommends appealing to the egotism motive by offering employee volunteers a wide range of opportunities that provide both practical work experience and a break from routine. To appeal to the organizational citizenship motive, he recommends that companies recognize the contributions of employee volunteers and that nonprofit organizations recognize the contributions of the company.

*"It's a great team-building thing. That's what really got me into it."*

*"The company program gave volunteerism more visibility and encouraged me to get involved."*

*"Everyone who gets involved is given a t-shirt, and it's amazing to see hundreds of people all wearing these shirts fixing up the park. I've never felt so proud to be part of this company."*

*"The company wins and employees win and the community benefits."*

## What are the benefits and challenges of employee volunteering?

Nonprofit organizations interested in engaging employee volunteers need to understand the benefits and challenges — both for themselves and for the companies they work with. As a complement to their study of Ford's corporate volunteer program Evelina Rog, Mark Pancer, and Mark Baetz (Wilfrid Laurier University) interviewed representatives of 14 nonprofit organizations and 34 companies to learn about the benefits and challenges of employee volunteerism. Their findings are presented in a report entitled *Community and corporate perspectives on corporate volunteer programs: A win-win approach to community betterment*.

	Benefits	Challenges
For nonprofits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• access to skilled, motivated, reliable volunteers</li> <li>• greater capacity to complete tasks</li> <li>• better services for agency clients</li> <li>• more volunteers and volunteer referrals</li> <li>• increased donations to agencies</li> <li>• enhanced public awareness of the organization</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• need for specialized training</li> <li>• short-term nature of volunteer placements</li> <li>• sporadic nature of volunteer placements</li> <li>• difficulty providing meaningful volunteer experiences</li> <li>• lack of information about employees' skills and interests</li> <li>• the need to coordinate volunteer placements from a distance</li> </ul>
For corporations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• happier, more satisfied employees</li> <li>• employees can develop new skills</li> <li>• enhanced loyalty, satisfaction, and retention</li> <li>• higher levels of team spirit</li> <li>• increased productivity</li> <li>• increased visibility and exposure</li> <li>• enhanced public awareness of the organization</li> <li>• improved relations with clients, enhanced customer loyalty, and increased sales</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• limited time available for volunteering</li> <li>• limited staff resources</li> <li>• cost of operating the program</li> <li>• time needed to plan and administer the program</li> <li>• finding meaningful volunteer opportunities</li> <li>• lack of good models, support, and information</li> </ul>

The survey carried out by the research team from Imagine Canada and the University of Lethbridge also shines light on the benefits and challenges of employee volunteerism. In the fact sheet entitled *Employee volunteerism: Benefits and challenges for businesses*, Debra Basil, Mary Runte, Cathy Barr, and M. Easwaramoorthy report that 71% of companies that supported employee volunteerism were able to cite at least one benefit while only 49% mentioned any challenges.

The benefits mentioned most often by companies were:

- improves corporate public image
- improves employee morale
- improves relations with the surrounding community

This fact sheet also provides useful insights into why some companies do not support employee volunteering. The most common reason companies gave for not supporting employee volunteering was that they had never considered it. Some companies said that they didn't think it was their responsibility; a few said they couldn't afford it or that they weren't interested in it.

Research	Report
National survey of almost 1000 companies	<i>Business support for employee volunteers in Canada: Results of a national survey</i>
Interviews with 100 Ford employees	<i>Corporate volunteer programs: Maximizing employee motivation and minimizing barriers to program participation</i>
Interviews with 29 employees and an online survey of over 400 employees	<i>Intra-organizational volunteerism: A manual for creating internal marketing programs to recruit employee volunteers</i>
Interviews with representatives of 14 nonprofit organizations and 34 companies	<i>Community and corporate perspectives on corporate volunteer programs: A win-win approach to community betterment</i>

## Where can I get these resources?

These and other resources published by the Knowledge Development Centre are available free of charge from our Web site: [www.kcd-cdc.ca](http://www.kcd-cdc.ca). They can also be accessed through the Knowledge Development Centre Special Collection developed by the Imagine Canada – John Hodgson Library. To search or browse the Special Collection, go to [www.nonprofitscan.ca](http://www.nonprofitscan.ca).

### Knowledge Development Centre

Since its inception in 2002, the Knowledge Development Centre has funded 61 community-based and national research projects on issues related to volunteers and volunteerism. The research is designed and conducted by researchers working in nonprofit organizations and post-secondary institutions across Canada. The Knowledge Development Centre is part of the Canada Volunteerism Initiative (CVI) and is funded by the Community Participation Directorate at Canadian Heritage. The program will end in March 2007.

### Imagine Canada

The Knowledge Development Centre is hosted by Imagine Canada, a national charitable organization that supports Canada's charities, nonprofit organizations, and socially conscious businesses and champions the work they do in our communities.

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