Benevity™

How to create a best-in-class *Corporate Volunteering* program - virtually

Congratulations! You've taken the first step to starting a **Corporate Volunteering program**. We're sure you have plenty of wonderful ideas you're chuffed to start putting them into action. It requires buy-in from several stakeholders and a solid plan (with goals!) broken down into smaller, actionable steps.

Plus, engaging employees isn't quite like it used to be. Today, it's about reimagining engagement activities to offer both physical and virtual opportunities. That will make it scalable and sustainable in the long-term.

That's what this guide is for.

Ready to learn how to create a best-in-class Corporate Volunteering program in your organisation?

What is *Employee Purpose* & how Corporate Volunteering fit in?

First, let's go back to basics. Employee Purpose is all about enabling and encouraging employees to bring Purpose to their professional environment and working life. A purpose-driven workplace is one where employees have the opportunity to work on what is meaningful for them. A corporate volunteering program is a concrete and powerful way to bring Purpose to life at work.

Some examples might include:

- Volunteering (online or physically) to develop their skills and give back
- Monetary and goods donations for causes that matter to them
- Taking care of their physical wellbeing and mental health
- Trying new habits to be more sustainable to protect our planet or support a more inclusive society
- Freedom to choose causes that matter on an individual level

"During times of crisis, individual purpose can be a guidepost that helps people face up to uncertainties and navigate them better, and thus mitigate the damaging effects of long-term stress.'"

McKinsey & Company
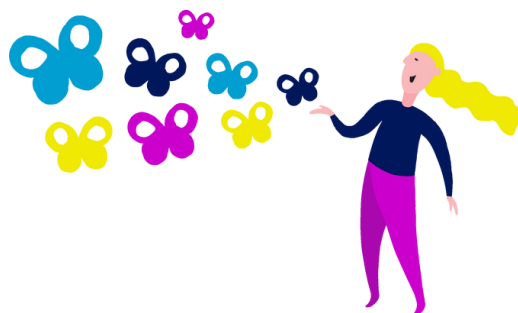
What is a *Corporate Volunteering Program?*

Corporate volunteering is a way for businesses to enable their employees to give back and contribute to communities. It's usually accompanied by volunteering time off (VTO) or other policies that empower employees to work with a larger purpose outside of their world of work. Corporate volunteering is a pillar of a company's corporate social responsibility (CSR) and/or employee engagement strategy.

1. Start with your company's core purpose and values

You probably already have these documented in your mission or purpose statement. But, if you don't, now is the time to do it. The objective of Corporate Volunteering programs is to contribute to profit, people, and the planet (the so-called "triple bottom line"), and is often linked to both your CSR and HR strategies.

It's an effective, authentic way to show your shareholders, customers and employees that you share values and that you take action on those values. When you set your core program principles, be as open and transparent as possible with your organisation about your why. This will help eliminate any scepticism. Show your employees that they can count on your support in leading purpose-driven lives.

Which causes to act on and support?
There are a few ways to select what cause to support. This can be top-down, where you and senior management can choose the causes. Alternatively, you can survey or talk to your employees to see which causes they want to support or are already supporting. Either way, make sure you share the why behind the causes you want to support.

The best way to go is usually a combination of both: you can have some central campaigns focused on "top-down" causes, while also empowering your employees to choose what causes to support at a local level (or "bottom up") as well.

Remember your stakeholders including employees, suppliers, customers, and communities and find out which issues matter to them and which you can authentically act on.

2. Set your goals

Clear and measurable goals are key to launching a successful Corporate Volunteering program. Consider how your program goals can contribute to your company's overall strategy and identify metrics to translate these objectives into measurable outcomes.

Here are some examples for inspiration:

- Reducing turnover
- Improving employee engagement
- Improving employee wellbeing & mental health
- Improving your employer brand/gaining recognition as a great place to work or a responsible company
- Increasing positive impact in the community
- Increasing participation in your existing giving and volunteering program.

Millennials value social responsibility by default and prefer to work in a purpose-driven workplace than one that pays more. Your workplace volunteering and giving program can become a key factor in recruiting and retaining the best talents in your industry.

Questions to ask at this stage

- What are your company's short- and long-term goals for a Corporate Volunteering program?
- Who are your internal stakeholders, and what are their goals?
- How are you collecting the data/information on stakeholder goals?
- How will you inform and involve employees in these goals?

3. Setting up the framework and action plan

Now that your Purpose and goals are clear, the next steps are to map out your action plan. How are you going to get employees to engage with your program?

Will you launch an annual campaign on a specific (or flexible) date per office? Or will it be an ongoing program? Or ideally, a combination of both?

If your CSR strategy is tied to the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), for instance, you can tie these into your program. As inspiration: you could launch themed campaigns linked to different SDGs. That way, your Employee Purpose program will be clearly tied to your Purpose or CSR strategy.

> *"82% of employees feel that purpose is important, but only 42% believe their organisations' purpose statements drive impact."*

McKinsey & Company

Questions to ask at this stage

- Is it important that you tie your CSR goals into your Corporate Volunteering program?
- How can you tie your Corporate Volunteering program to your CSR goals?
- What about your HR goals?
- How will employees participate in the program?
- Will employees be able to participate year-round? Or will it be specific campaigns? Or a mix of both?

4. Engage the right teams

Setting up a Corporate Volunteering program is a common effort, and it's important to involve the right teams from the get-go. We've found that buy-in from the following teams is particularly important:

Company leadership

Executives need to set the tone and lead by example. They should act as role models by contributing and engaging their teams in the program. When the executive team shows they're purpose-driven, employees will believe in the program more.

Remember: Leadership will usually push for a plan that best meets business objectives. It's important to address them, but also to balance them with the needs of employees, the community and nonprofit partners.

Human Resources

This team will help create a framework for your company's Corporate Volunteering program. This might be your team, in which case, consider what policy you will put in place to support your employees, and at which moments during the employee experience you'll embed this program (such as during onboarding of new hires, donation matching, Dollars for Doers, rewards/incentives, or offering paid time off to volunteer...).

Internal Communications

This is vital to ensure clear and aligned communications with employees. With teams spread out across a lot more locations, it's all the more important to communicate through the right channels to reach them.

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) / Sustainability Team or Company foundation

This might be your team! This team will ensure the program fits in with your overall CSR strategy. Do you have existing non-profit partners? Are there particular causes to champion? What other CSR initiatives do you have in place?

IT

It's the era of remote and virtual programs. IT will be important for a smooth launch from a technical standpoint, such as compatibility and whitelisting.

Legal

Involve them to review data security and privacy requirements, or other legal concerns.

Questions to ask at this stage

- Who are the key stakeholders involved?
- Who can be responsible or the representative from each department?
- What are the goals of each department?

5. Engage key internal champions

- In addition to engaging leadership, communications and HR teams with the program, start looking for key champions at all levels of your organisation. This is particularly important for global programs, so you can best adapt the initiatives to each culture. Their role is to support and advocate for the program internally, to help you to put the program into practice and to adapt it to the local culture.

- They may even be able to help you understand the team: would some healthy competition help motivate them? Or might this particular team prefer to collaborate toward a shared purpose? Let them help you understand your employees' culture at a local level.

- Look out for colleagues who are committed, passionate about the program, willing to promote it among other employees, and ready to collect feedback and ideas to improve the program. Let them know that this is a valuable growth opportunity to develop their leadership skills in a fun, meaningful way.

- This can be your first communication about the program. Reach out to teams: ask people managers to nominate people on their teams, send out a survey for volunteers in the company, or to start making their teams aware that you'll need their support.

A well-organised and engaged network of champions to support the program before and during the launch can increase participation in the first 3 months by up to 77%.

Tip: *Spread out across multiple locations? As a rule of thumb, having **at least one champion per office** is a good rule of thumb when developing your program.*

- This will also save you time, as champions can help you educate and answer any questions from employees.

- Be sure to train them before the launch, so they are equipped to support your program in the best way. This can be through workshops, webinars, and training videos made available on-demand. If you're working with a technology partner, this training can sometimes be provided to help you kick-off your program.

- In the era of remote working, online volunteering opportunities are even more important than before. So make sure your ambassadors are familiar with online opportunities and knowledgeable enough to be able to help and inspire others to use online tools as well.

6. Find a digital tool or platform to use

In pre-2020 employee engagement programs, having a virtual option was a nice-to-have. But today, it's not as simple as meeting up for a teambuilding activity anymore. It's important to offer an online option. Finding a way to make it accessible to everyone, regardless of where they are, is a good way to show your dedication to the cause. There are strong digital platforms to help host and manage your Employee Purpose program, and even more purpose-driven activity opportunities online.

A partner can help you find the right causes that are aligned with your company values.

A digital platform lets you reach both desk and non-desk workers.

Plus, online solutions let everyone involved see everything that's happening in real time.

An online solution has numerous benefits: your employees can easily access and browse through projects, you can centralise and manage the whole program in one place, and you can track the impact of your program and share the results with your organisation.

An online platform also boosts employee engagement, because it makes it easy to log in from anywhere and follow projects in real time even when your teams work remotely. It brings the options to your employees and makes participation easy.

Further benefits of online platforms:

- Easy way to track employee participation, including volunteer hours
- Keeps donation counts and hours volunteered up-to-date
- Track how many people participated
- No need to manually work through spreadsheets
- Manage events (physical and virtual) online

7. Expand your engagement options

There are plenty of opportunities available for your Corporate Volunteering program. Below, find both online and in-person ideas you can implement. Many initiatives expand beyond traditional volunteering, which have become popular ways for employees to engage, near or far.

Online, skills-based volunteering is a flexible and impactful way for your employees to help nonprofits, regardless of where they're located. Here are a few examples of projects that can be managed 100% online and that are in high demand from nonprofits. Some of these are also possible as team activities in the form of an online brainstorming session or even over longer term group work:

- Preparing communications like external newsletters or designing a brochure
- Virtual coaching or mentoring
- Translating documents or a website
- Creating a financial plan
- Finding new fundraising sources or preparing grant proposals
- Conducting an IT audit of technology used

Field volunteering involves going out to physically help a nonprofit organisation and is also a great way to combine team building with community impact. For example:

- A Trash Challenge, where employees go to a local park, beach side, or another community area and pick up trash, and leave it better than they found it!
- Helping local farmers to maintain their pastures, or cleaning a riverbed to support the ecosystem
- Hosting a workshop to coach people with a migrant background find a job

7. Expand your engagement options

Other activities that support employees' mental and physical wellbeing can be particularly effective, when dealing with change, creating connections among colleagues while encouraging positive habits:

- Weekly online meditation class to your colleagues to relieve stress and improve focus
- 15-minute workout break for the whole office in the afternoon
- Online cooking class or book reading for employees' kids to entertain the whole team's kids, so they can focus on work
- Fun, everyday Challenges that teams can do together virtually, like planking every day for a week, or going meatless.

And lastly, you can organise initiatives to help the community as a whole:

- Giving blood
- Collecting food donations or delivering them
- Helping elderly and risk populations with their pharmacy runs and grocery shopping.

8. Prepare your launch

We've found that the most impactful launches are ones where companies have a specific campaign to show their support and is well worth the investment to launch your program on the right foot. Here are some ideas for launch activities:

Collect testimonials
Get testimonials from champions or the management team (or both!) and share them through your social media and internal communications channels. Nothing will convince your employees to participate better than a positive comment from a colleague or leader.

Introduce the program via online workshops
Share the objectives of the program. Why would employees want to participate? Include fun activities to get your employees motivated to start contributing to your program.

Some examples of fun and inspiring activities could be:

- An interactive online presentation from a nonprofit
- A "pub quiz" about some of today's environmental issues

Create a video
Get together with the leadership team and champions and create a teaser video to get your employees excited about the launch

Empower everyone to pick a cause with a voting campaign
Give your employees a voice in your program to truly engage them from Day 1, by letting them vote for a cause, for example, from a selection of projects related to your corporate purpose. This works particularly well for donations, which you can also tie in with a donation matching campaign. If you have a grant budget, it's well worth it!

Match donations over your launch period
You can also combine your voting campaign with donation matching, by offer to match donations made during your launch to show your support. As an example, if an employee decides to donate $20 to a nonprofit close to their heart, the company commits to donate $20 as well, to the same nonprofit. There are lots of variations with a similar objective, to boost awareness and participation by offering meaningful rewards and incentives to your employees.

For example:
- Offer a randomly-assigned donation credit: Employees are randomly assigned a donation credit and find out upon creating their account.
- Offer donations for platform signups
- Plant a tree for good actions taken: Some platforms have built-in gamification elements like a virtual points system that accumulates as your teams take action. You can associate a certain number of points with a tree planted to encourage action!
- Step count challenge: Combine wellbeing and positive impact by matching every step taken by your employees with a donation.

Match volunteering hours with donations (aka Dollars for doers)
Support employee volunteering with a Dollars for doers initiative (this can also be a year-long policy), where each hour of volunteering made by an employee is matched with a set donation from your company. For example, for every 1 hour of volunteering, your company can offer $10 the same nonprofit. If you'd like to encourage volunteering, this is a meaningful way to show employees you care about what they care about.

Key *takeaways*

A Corporate Volunteering program is a powerful way to engage employees while making an impact. The launch phase is a key moment for you to set the stage in your organisation. Remember to plan carefully, think about how it links to your business, and structure your program launch so you can make the most of it from Day 1.

Build up to it, and eventually you'll have a meaningful, sustainable program. With the right technology, you can build a robust, impactful and engaging program that can be a real differentiator for your brand and business.

Have *questions?*
We're here to help.

www.benevity.com