

DEVELOPING AN EFFECTIVE CORPORATE VOLUNTEER PROGRAM:

Lessons from the Ford Motor Company
of Canada Experience

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DEVELOPING AN EFFECTIVE CORPORATE VOLUNTEER PROGRAM:

Lessons from the Ford Motor Company of Canada Experience

Developing an Effective Corporate Volunteer Program

Introduction

Corporate volunteer programs — company-sponsored programs that encourage and enable employees to volunteer in their communities — have been springing up across Canada. Some programs offer employees time off work to volunteer. Others allow employees access to company premises and resources for their volunteer activity. No matter what approach they take, these programs pay dividends to companies, employees and the community.

These programs are becoming an increasingly prominent feature of corporate life across North America. Fifty-eight per cent of the 248 companies surveyed in 2000 by the Points of Light Foundation in the United States had formal volunteer programs (Points of Light Foundation, 2000). Nine per cent of these had been in place for more than 20 years. Their importance is reflected in the fact that over half (52%) of the companies surveyed incorporated a commitment to community service in their mission statements.

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We wish to thank the Canadian Centre for Philanthropy for their support for this research. We are grateful to the management and employees of the Ford Motor Company of Canada, particularly those who gave so generously of their time to share their thoughts about and experiences with the corporate volunteer program. We give special thanks to Renée Bélec, formerly Corporate Citizenship Manager, who provided the initial encouragement to conduct this research at Ford, and Heather Gillis-Dunn, Public Affairs Associate, who played an integral role in our ability to carry out this research — by soliciting participation from employees, responding to their questions, forwarding the appropriate information to us, and providing background information about the program. Her enthusiasm for our study was very much appreciated. We would also like to thank Adèle Lafrance for helping us with the coding of the interviews which form the basis of this research, Jessica Taylor for conducting a thorough review of the literature and eagerly applying it to our study, and Norah McClintock for her superb editorial work and her help in negotiating this manual through its final stages of preparation.

Canadian businesses and corporations have also demonstrated significant support for volunteering. A survey of Canadian companies in 1995 (Rostami & Hall, 1996) indicated that 25 per cent of Canadian companies had a formal volunteering policy. In the recent National Survey of Giving,

Volunteering and Participating in Canada (Hall, McKeown, & Roberts, 2001), 27 per cent of employed volunteers reported that their employer had given them approval to modify their hours of work so that they could volunteer. A study of 25 Canadian companies with comprehensive employee volunteer programs (Hatton, 2000) found that the majority of these programs had been in existence for over 10 years.

Why we wrote this manual

This manual describes how to design and implement a successful corporate volunteer program. It draws on the experiences of one company — the Ford Motor Company of Canada. Ford is one of the largest companies in Canada to embark on a significant corporate volunteer program. The program began formally in February 2000 and is still in its early stages. This seemed an opportune time to identify the factors that have made the program successful and to identify some of the challenges that need to be addressed for any company to develop and maintain an effective program.

In preparing this manual, we interviewed two groups of employees: Those who had taken part in Ford's corporate volunteer program, and those who were eligible to participate in the program but had not.¹ Using the Ford experience, we'll take you step-by-

step through the process of starting and maintaining a corporate volunteer program. We'll share the thoughts and insights of Ford employees, including some of the difficulties they faced and how such challenges might be addressed. We'll also let them tell you, in their own words, about the benefits they, their company, and the community gained from volunteering.

What a corporate volunteer program can accomplish

Corporate volunteer programs are beneficial to companies, employees, and the community. A corporate volunteer program can result in greater employee morale, increased job satisfaction, enhanced corporate image in the community and greater connections between a company and its customers. Employees can learn new skills, expand their networks, and experience energizing personal growth that carries over into the workplace. And, of course, the community benefits from the work that volunteers accomplish and the enhanced sense of community that is created when people give their time freely for the common good. For examples of the benefits of Ford's corporate volunteer program, see page 14.

¹ We interviewed a total of 105 employees — 59 employees (40 men and 19 women) who had participated in the program, and 46 employees (31 men and 15 women) who had not participated in the program.

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Stage 1: Decide What You Want To Accomplish

A corporate volunteer program can have two kinds of objectives: corporate objectives (e.g., team building, lower absenteeism, better corporate image); and, community objectives (e.g., increasing volunteerism in the community, assisting community agencies, improving the local environment). The objectives that you choose for your corporate volunteer program will have implications for:

- the kinds of volunteer activities that employees can participate in;
- the kinds of organizations for whom they might volunteer; and,
- the specific program requirements.

For example, if the objective of your corporate volunteer program is to facilitate team building, then you will probably want to require that employees volunteer in teams. If your objective is to enhance your corporate image, then activities or organizations should be chosen with a view to ensuring that the company name is visible.

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A note on this section

Throughout this manual, we have provided examples and suggestions from our case study, Ford of Canada's corporate volunteer program, including responses from more than 100 Ford employees that were interviewed for this research project.

How Ford's corporate volunteer program got started

Ford's corporate volunteer program in Canada originated from a 1998 team-building exercise, known as the Business Leadership Initiative (BLI).

This involved the company's worldwide salaried workforce, including 2000 employees from Ford of Canada and Ford Credit Canada. The initiative involved three days of meetings and activities designed to share the corporate vision and the company's key sources of strategic advantage with all employees. One of the strategies was to encourage "corporate citizenship." As a result, on the first day of the BLI meetings, entire Canadian teams were loaded on a fleet of buses and taken to volunteer at nonprofit organizations, to

experience what corporate citizenship was all about through a hands-on experience of "giving back to the community." The event was so successful that many employees asked how they could get more involved in the community. Ford saw an opportunity to continue strong team building in this manner. In February 2000, Ford of Canada announced its formal corporate program, which allows salaried employees to spend up to 16 hours per year, on company time, volunteering in the community.

Stage 2: Launching and Publicizing Your Corporate Volunteer Program

To launch your corporate volunteer program successfully, you need to decide:

- who will be eligible to participate;
- whether or not to pilot test the program;
- how to create awareness of the program (i.e., what communication media you will use to publicize the program, who will be responsible for this, and what messages will be conveyed); and,
- how to maintain awareness of the program.

Eligibility

Your first important decision is to determine who will be eligible to participate in your corporate volunteer program. If it is not feasible to offer the program to all employees, you may decide to open the program to one or more of these groups:

- salaried/nonunionized employees;
- hourly/unionized employees; and,
- other potentially interested individuals (e.g., retirees and families of employees).

The more eligible groups there are, the more administrative resources will need to be allocated to the corporate volunteer program, but at the same time, the greater the potential impact of the program.

Pilot testing

You may want to pilot test your corporate volunteer program for a short period before opening it up to all eligible employees. This can help you work out the wrinkles, establish clear processes, refine details, and provide some time in which to develop relationships with community agencies.

Creating awareness

Company-wide awareness of your corporate volunteer program is critical to a successful launch. This means:

- A) Choosing methods of communication that will ensure all eligible employees get the message.
- B) Determining the key messages to be conveyed and stating these clearly and explicitly (e.g. purpose of program, any special requirements, and its voluntary nature).

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Who can participate in Ford's corporate volunteer program?

The Ford program is designed for salaried employees across Canada. Hourly employees can participate but must have manager approval because, in order to participate during working hours, they have to come off the production line. One salaried employee noted that getting the hourly workers more involved would make a big impact on the community, as hourly employees outnumber salaried employees by a ratio of about 8 to 1.

Pilot testing the Ford corporate volunteer program

When Ford of Canada launched its corporate volunteer program in February 2000, it initially made it available only to employees at head office. This gave Ford time to: learn about the agencies that existed in the community; find agencies that could provide volunteer opportunities that met the requirements of the program (e.g., team involvement, daytime hours, and four hour/one day/two day projects); to develop processes that ensured the program was running

smoothly; and, to see how the program was working. After conducting a short-term pilot test, the company decided to expand the program to all interested salaried employees across Canada.

Using existing networks to launch the program

To make employees aware of the establishment of its corporate volunteer program, the Ford Corporate Citizenship Department used e-mail (with a Web site link attached) as the primary

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- C) Making information about the program easily accessible to those interested in participating.
- D) Ensuring that managers, in particular, are aware of the program so that they can pass on the message, just as with any other corporate initiative.

A) *Choosing the method(s) of communication to ensure awareness*

You can inform employees about your corporate volunteer program through various corporate communication channels. Using a combination of communication channels will increase the likelihood that the message will reach more employees. Possible communication methods include:

- your company internet or intranet Web site;
- your internal communications network;
- e-mail;
- your company newsletter;
- a presentation to all employees by a company representative (e.g., the president, CEO, or program manager);
- displays in public areas (e.g., cafeteria, bulletin boards);

- communication by managers at departmental meetings; and,
- personal contact.

How you choose to communicate will affect the level of awareness of the program and may also influence employees' decisions to participate. You should consider the following factors when deciding on the most suitable/effective communication media for your company:

- The size of your company (a smaller company can be more informal and/or personal, while a large company may have to work harder at making messages seem friendly and/or personal while using more formal communication channels).
- Whether you already have effective communication channels (messages about the program should be built into the communication channels that are already being used).
- Whether you operate at one central location or multiple locations (a single presentation to all employees may be enough for a centralized operation, while multiple communication media may be needed for multiple-site operations).

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communication medium. The volunteer program has a dedicated Web site that explains the program and lists volunteer opportunities. This is supplemented by information on Ford's in-house television broadcasting operation, the Ford Communications Network (FCN). Sites that are geographically distant from head office were contacted via telephone by the program coordinator. These communications described the nature and parameters of the program.

Ensuring that volunteering is voluntary

The Ford program is completely voluntary. Employees are not evaluated on their participation in the program and there are no goals for the number of employees involved. Employees' supervisors and managers do not have access to individual employee volunteer records, although sometimes employees seek the approval of their immediate supervisor for the volunteer activity. While employees are not evaluated on their volunteer

record, one measure of managers' performance is their contribution and commitment to corporate citizenship, which includes being supportive of employee participation in the program. In performance reviews, many employees voluntarily highlight their volunteer activities throughout the year.

Ford's program promotes team involvement

To qualify for support by Ford employees, organizations have to be registered charities, which rules out

- Corporate culture. In a corporation where employees have diverse beliefs and values, the company may have to work much harder to persuade employees of the value of the program than in a company in which all employees support corporate citizenship as a company objective.

Who will communicate the message?

To communicate the message about the corporate volunteer program effectively, it is important to have someone who will readily command the attention and respect of employees, and who is committed to and knowledgeable about the program. It is best to choose a company representative who is perceived as holding corporate social responsibility in high regard, is already responsible for current corporate donations or volunteer involvement, and/or is visible to, or approachable, by employees. Your choices might include:

- your company president or CEO;
- your corporate donations/volunteer manager;
- human resources personnel; and,
- your corporate communications representative.

B) Determining key messages to convey

Once you have chosen how to communicate your program to employees, you need to decide the key messages that you want to convey about the program. Your messages should help employees understand what is expected of them and how they can expect to be supported if they choose to participate. These messages also play a role in shaping employees' attitudes about the program and the company. These messages need to be communicated clearly and explicitly. Consider the following when deciding on your key messages:

1. Corporate objectives and expectations. These messages should convey the importance of the corporate volunteer program to the company and clarify what is expected of employees:

- purpose of the program (e.g., Where does the program fit into the company's goals and values? What benefits can employees expect from participating in the program? What benefits can the company and the community expect?); and,
- expectations of participation (e.g., Does the company expect all employees to take part? What if an employee chooses not to participate?).

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activities such as coaching minor sports teams. Qualifying projects must involve teams of at least five employees to facilitate team-building and leadership skills. In practice, the composition of the team is determined in a number of ways. For example, an entire department may volunteer together or smaller departments may link with other departments. Other requirements are that all work must be completed during regular business hours and projects must encompass four hour, one day or two day off-site tasks and

projects. Some employees attempt to use the full two days of allotted time, while others use less than the two day allotment in order to accommodate an entire department and its work schedule.

Building awareness of the Ford corporate volunteer program

Volunteer opportunities, including all of the details that potential volunteers need — the organization, the type of work, where to show up — are listed in detail on a Web site on the company's intranet, and employees

register for the projects that interest them. Occasionally, employees will find volunteer opportunities on their own and make their own arrangements.

Most of the employees interviewed for this research project became aware of the program through the formal communication media used by the Corporate Citizenship Department, namely, e-mail and the Ford Communication Network. Others heard about it through more informal means, including from managers,

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2. Logistical elements. These messages should inform employees about the parameters of the program and procedures for getting involved:

- rules or restrictions (e.g., for what kinds of organizations can employees volunteer, when can employees participate, how much time can they devote to the program, do they have to participate in teams, If so, how will these be constituted?); and,
- procedures for signing up or obtaining approval (e.g., can they sign up through the company intranet or do they have to contact the program administrator in some other way, do they have to get formal management approval?).

3. Supporting infrastructure. These messages should convey what employees can expect if they choose to participate in the program:

- management support (e.g., will the decision to participate or not to participate be supported by management?);
- dealing with conflicts of interest between business goals and program participation (e.g., what happens if an employee has to decide between attending an important meeting or fulfilling a planned volunteer activity?); and,

- job coverage (e.g., will anyone cover the employee's duties while he or she is away, and if not, what will happen?).

C) Making information about your corporate volunteer program easily accessible

Interested employees should be able to access information about the program easily. Find ways to publicize the program in visible areas, such as: a prominent link on your company's Web site, postings on company or department bulletin boards, or notices in your company newsletter. Be sure to tell employees where they can get additional information about the program (e.g., from their managers, from a specific contact person, or on the company Web site).

D) Ensuring that management is aware of the program and corporate expectations

Communication with management about the program is important. To ensure that employees are supported in their decision to participate or not in the corporate volunteer program, it is essential that management is aware of the program, understands the corporate expectations for participation, encourages participation in the program, and supports interested employees. You may want to provide training or communication sessions for management to help make program implementation a success.

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from U.S. counterparts who had participated in their own program (which was launched one year before the Canadian program), or from co-workers. But despite use of formal and informal communication tools, some employees were not aware of the program. Of the 46 employees interviewed who did not take part in the program, 20 per cent said they had never heard about the program and another 15 per cent remembered an announcement when the program was established, but didn't know whether it was still in existence. There

was also some confusion over eligibility, program requirements, and the process of getting involved. Lack of awareness about the program was the key reason cited for not getting involved by a significant number of non-participants interviewed. This points to the critical importance of ongoing communications about the program and its requirements.

Management awareness and support of the Ford corporate volunteer program

Management was made aware of the

program at the same time as all other eligible employees. As with other employees, awareness of the program varied among managers. Some of the Ford managers were knowledgeable about the program, having heard about it from a variety of sources, including presentations at their facility, e-mail, and formal communication from senior managers. Others, however, had heard little about the program and its requirements. Support for the program also varied. While many employees indicated that their

Beyond the launch of the program: maintaining awareness

Announcing the initial establishment of a corporate volunteer program is not enough to ensure that all employees will become aware of it, will know how to participate, and will actually make the decision to participate. Communication about the program really involves two phases: the launch phase, and the much longer and somewhat different process of continued communication.

Beyond the launch phase, you must work to ensure the program's visibility. You can use many of the communication methods you used in the launch phase or try different methods. To maintain awareness of your corporate volunteer program:

- Make information about the program easily accessible to those interested in participating

(e.g., have a visible link on the company Web site, have the contact person maintain an open-door policy, and include notices about the program in the company newsletter).

- Inform new employees about the program as part of their orientation process.
- Find creative methods of communication (e.g., send periodic e-mails about new volunteer opportunities with a link to the corporate volunteer program Web site in the e-mail).
- Use existing methods of communication (e.g., departmental meetings) to update employees or announce new opportunities.
- Issue press releases that describe employees' participation in the program.

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managers encouraged their participation in the program, a few reported that their managers were less supportive.

Creating ongoing awareness of the Ford corporate volunteer program

In a corporation that is continuously adjusting to change and establishing new initiatives, it is easy for an employee to overlook a one-time announcement. Communicating with all employees can be particularly challenging for a large manufacturing

company like Ford, which has many types of facilities and locations. As a result, the Ford Corporate Citizenship Department tries to build and maintain awareness of the program by continuous communication with employees. When the Ford corporate volunteer program coordinator sends out e-mail messages about upcoming volunteer opportunities, she changes the "look" of the e-mail by using a different background colour and presenting the volunteer opportunities in catchy colours. Ford employees are receptive to receiving

information about the program. In fact, they appreciate reminders and updates on available volunteer opportunities. Some employees suggested that increased communication might result in increased participation.

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Stage 3: Deciding to Participate

When participation in a corporate volunteer program is voluntary, employees make their own decision about whether or not to get involved. A number of factors influence this decision. Some factors motivate employees to participate, while other factors inhibit participation. According to a comprehensive study conducted by the Points of Light Foundation, factors that motivate employees to participate include: having a variety of options for volunteer involvement, making

participation voluntary, and giving participants highly visible recognition for their volunteer work (Vineyard, 1996). According to another study by the Points of Light Foundation, factors that inhibit participation include: lack of time, lack of management support, and lack of employee interest (Points of Light Foundation, 2000). To make your program a success, stress the factors that encourage participation and work on decreasing barriers.

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Motivations and barriers

Ford employees who participated in our study identified factors that encouraged their participation in the Ford corporate volunteer program and factors that were barriers to participation.

Factors that influenced Ford employees to participate included:

Expressing personal values

- the satisfaction of helping someone or helping the community;
- a sense of responsibility;
- the opportunity to support a cause or an organization the employee believed in;
- the opportunity to address a community need;
- personal values and philosophy; and,
- the opportunity to pursue volunteer activities that employees were unable to engage in on their own time.

Gaining personal benefits

- the opportunity to get to know and be involved in the community;
- a chance to get out of the office;
- reducing stress and providing balance within the workplace;
- the opportunity to do something new and interesting and to learn new things;
- the opportunity to use skills not used at the office;
- career advancement; and,
- the opportunity to get to know co-workers.

The influence of others

- the example of friends, family, co-workers, supervisors, and other individuals; and,
- approaches by a co-worker.

Perceived corporate expectations

- the company's encouragement to support the community;
- perception that participation in the program is compulsory; and,
- wanting to be part of the "team."

Supporting the company

- the desire to support the company's image; and,
- wanting to be a good managerial role model.

Factors that prevented Ford employees from volunteering or made them reluctant to volunteer included:

- preference to volunteer on one's own or on one's own time;
- not attracted to the volunteer agencies or jobs listed on the Web site;
- emotional discomfort;
- other priorities;
- shyness;
- job demands that interfere with commitment to volunteer;
- perceived lack of managerial support, and,
- program is not supported at the facility.

Stage 4: Volunteering Through a Corporate Volunteer Program

Structure versus flexibility in your program

While your corporate volunteer program may include a number of requirements for participation (e.g., employees must participate in teams of at least five employees), you may also have to incorporate some flexibility into the program to allow all interested employees to participate. For example, it may not be feasible for some facilities to allow more than a couple of employees to be away from the office at one time, or a volunteer agency that is personally important to an employee may not be capable of handling even a small group of volunteers. In either case, program requirements may create barriers to participation. You should be aware of the potential consequences of your program requirements and ensure there is enough flexibility to accommodate cases that do not fit these requirements.

Types of volunteer opportunities

Employees have different skills, interests, values, and needs. For example, while some employees may be opposed to using their business and technical skills outside of the workplace, others find such applied

activities particularly rewarding. Volunteer opportunities available through a corporate volunteer program should span a variety of activities, including:

- outdoor and indoor activities;
- activities that require business or technical skills and those that do not;
- activities that involve manual labour and activities that involve cognitive skills;
- activities that can be completed by small, medium, and large groups;
- team-oriented activities in which working together is required;
- activities that are fun, interesting and/or different;
- activities that have tangible results;
- opportunities that allow interaction with others (e.g., co-workers, agency representatives, other volunteers, and clients being assisted by agencies);
- four-hour, one-day, and two-day volunteer activities;
- activities that span different seasons; and,
- activities that focus around particular times of the year (e.g., Thanksgiving, Christmas, etc.).

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Ford's program allows for some exceptions to the rules

Most Ford corporate volunteer program participants volunteered in groups ranging from five employees to several dozen. This met Ford's requirement that volunteering contribute to team building. But the program is flexible enough to allow some exceptions, such as when:

- volunteer activities require fewer than five people in a group; and,
- an employee prefers to volunteer

on his/her own at an agency that is personally important to him/her.

This flexibility allows some employees who would not otherwise be able to participate in the program to do so.

Ford employees focus on team-oriented manual labour

Ford employees helped a wide variety of agencies through the corporate

volunteer program. However, the vast majority of employees participated in activities that involved strictly manual labour (e.g., building homes for Habitat for Humanity). A smaller number engaged in activities that gave them an opportunity to interact directly with members of the community (e.g., helping mentally and physically challenged adults to plant a garden at Bonnie Lee Farm).

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Maximizing positive experiences and minimizing negative experiences

Generally you can expect many positive reactions and feelings from employees about their volunteer experiences through your corporate volunteer program. But negative reactions or feelings about volunteering may also arise. You can minimize these by:

- providing employees with information about the agency and the tasks they are expected to complete, so that the task fits with the employees' interests and skills;
- urging all volunteers to work to their fullest extent;
- discussing with agency representatives what they can expect from volunteers and what the company expects from the volunteer agency;
- keeping your volunteer team together so that people are not working individually on tasks, if at all possible;
- if teams are split up, ensuring that tasks require similar effort; if this is not possible, have groups switch tasks after a period of time;
- selecting organizations that clearly represent a worthwhile cause; this may require some up-front research on the agency, its needs, and its opportunities;
- offering volunteer opportunities that employees enjoy, feel positive about, and like to support;
- encouraging management at all levels to get involved in volunteering with their functional unit;
- ensuring that there is a feedback system so that employees can provide ideas on future volunteer activities (e.g., helping a food bank organize its distribution system to make it more efficient); and,
- ensuring that the organization to be assisted makes effective use of the volunteers' time (e.g., that it has enough work for the volunteers, but not more than they can realistically handle).

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Some volunteers were involved in activities in which they learned new skills or applied existing skills (e.g., electro-fishing with the Department of Fisheries and Natural Resources, staffing phones for a Variety Club Telethon).

How Ford employees choose their agencies and activities

Ford employees have a variety of reasons for supporting certain agencies or volunteering for certain activities. Here are the factors they consider when choosing the type of

volunteer activity that they would like to take part in:

- emotional involvement ("not too depressing");
- personal comfort zone (activities that are not "personally uncomfortable");
- relevance of personal experiences to agency (i.e., family members affected by similar problems, e.g., cancer, Alzheimer's);
- the chance to use skills related to one's job or to learn new skills;
- wanting to make a difference (e.g., seeing tangible results, meeting beneficiaries of work, sense of accomplishment);
- wanting to have some fun;
- perceptions of the agency's accountability, effectiveness, and need;
- the opportunity to interact with the community or meet others;
- variety, (e.g., indoor and outdoor activities);
- the opportunity to work as a team from the office;

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- timing (i.e., when the volunteering will take place);
- whether or not physical labour is involved;
- the location of agency (i.e., home town community versus place of work); and,
- work in pleasant environmental conditions (e.g., “nice weather” for outdoor activity).

How Ford employees feel about their volunteering through Ford’s corporate volunteer program

Ford employees who participated in the Ford corporate volunteer program experienced a variety of immediate reactions and feelings about their volunteer experiences. These can be divided into positive/rewarding reactions and negative/disappointing reactions. The vast majority of employees reported positive reactions to their volunteer experiences. Some experiences, however, evoked negative or mixed feelings in employees.

Factors that made volunteering positive or rewarding were:

- the opportunity for team building/bonding with co-workers, creating a “family feeling,” and working together towards a common goal outside of the workplace;
- contributing to a positive image of the company;
- feeling appreciated by the beneficiaries of the volunteer work, including agency representatives and clients of the agency;

- being able to see the direct results of their work and experiencing a sense of accomplishment in a non-work environment;
- having the opportunity to meet new people both within Ford and in the community;
- “eye-opening” experiences that increased awareness of the needs in the community;
- working with people from “different walks of life,” different cultures, and all levels of people from the company, including senior management;
- bringing together different viewpoints and skills and allowing for the exchange of ideas;
- seeing first-hand the enthusiasm and commitment of the volunteers and staff of the organizations being helped;
- the preparation of the organization and the extent to which it made valuable use of volunteers’ time;
- the opportunity to learn more about other employees (e.g., that they face similar family issues, have various talents, have a similar background, have their own struggles);
- an evident sense of need that made employees feel that their volunteering was making a difference;
- taking part in activities that were fun, interesting, or different from their usual day-to-day routines; and,
- the “stress-relieving” aspect of volunteering.

Factors that made volunteering negative/disappointing or arouse mixed feelings:

- overwork (e.g., being given more work than could be accomplished or feeling they were being taken advantage of);²
- lack of agency preparation, leading to under-utilization of volunteers;
- less camaraderie when the employee volunteer group is split up;
- emotionally draining work;
- lack of appreciation from an agency representative (e.g., indicating a preference for financial contributions or a discount on a new vehicle rather than volunteer time);
- perceiving the cause being supported as not worthwhile;
- lack of an evident sense of need (e.g., when volunteers assist someone who is clearly capable of paying for the service or when volunteers complete projects that would normally be done by paid staff);
- apparent lack of effort among other employees;
- difficult working conditions (e.g., dirty, dusty and hot);
- the organization’s need for management advice so that resources (material, human) are not wasted; and,
- if a group is split up, demanding too much effort from one group and not enough effort from the other.

² It is important to note however, that Ford employees generally did not mind working hard, tended to approach the work to be done with a goal in mind, and often surprised the agency by completing tasks ahead of schedule.

Stage 5: The Impact of a Corporate Volunteer Program

A corporation can expect its corporate volunteer program to have numerous benefits, not only for the community it is helping, but also for its employees and the corporation as a whole. Some benefits will be immediate (e.g., the impact of an employee feeling that he or she has made a difference in someone's life, the improved environment of a park that has been cleaned, a new employee's sense of greater connection with co-workers). Other benefits will become apparent over time (e.g., an employee's personal growth, increased level of volunteering in the community, and enhanced corporate visibility in the community). Perhaps the most significant result is that the benefits employees derive from participating in a corporate volunteer program can, in turn, lead to a commitment to volunteering. As one Ford employee said: "[the corporate volunteer program] more than pays for itself."

Examples from the Ford volunteer program: Everyone benefits

The Ford corporate volunteer program produced three types of benefits: corporate, individual, and community. The key benefits, along with comments from some of the 105 Ford employees that were interviewed, are listed below.

Corporate benefits

The company benefitted directly and indirectly through:

- Increased pride and positive feelings about the company.

"I really like to be able to toot our company's horn a bit. This company does a lot of things for Oakville and I love to be able to tell people that yesterday I spent the day [volunteering]. It's a pride issue for the company. I love to be able to say that kind of stuff."

- Enhanced, closer, or more trusting, working relationships, higher morale, and greater job satisfaction at the company.

"Doing things outside of work, I feel, helps the work atmosphere Sharing something where you laughed or sweated or had a good lunch brings this closeness to people and when you have that you work better together In the long run, it helps the morale among employees here if you do things as a group."

- Greater connection with the customer/consumer.

"[Through volunteering] you also have a better handle on what your customers are like Spending more time away from your regular day-to-day stuff also gives you a chance to connect with customers."

- Increased loyalty to the company and other employees.

"Being together and rendering services for someone else tends to make you view each other [as] more than just co-workers or machines of the Ford Motor Company. You get to see each other as human beings, so it tends to get the family feeling in the company going."

- Improved corporate image, reputation and perception of the company.

"It helps in a selfish way for Ford Motor Company. It helps our reputation We are seen as a better company if we give to the community."

■ Increased sales.

“It really does help when you go to these places [to volunteer]. People get to know you and say, ‘Well, you’re from Ford.’ It’s surprising how people swing over and buy a Ford product or say, ‘Oh, we’re going to buy a new car, any suggestions?’”

“From a Ford Motor Company standpoint, it’s proving that your company is a good corporate citizen. I want you to buy a Ford because you know what nice people build them.”

■ Enhanced corporate visibility in the community (from volunteers and the media).

“There is behind-the-scenes PR that can go on and I don’t think companies realize that.”

■ Understanding the interconnectedness of employees’ role within the broader corporate context.

“In reality, you have a lot in common... [others from the office] might be working on something totally different [at the office], but then you can see how your goals are really interconnected to a bigger common goal.”

■ Changed perspectives of, and changed relationships with, co-workers.

“You just get to learn [about] people better, which makes it a little bit better at work as well You can learn to appreciate them. They are not driven by this goal or this objective. They are a person, they have feelings, they have a sense of humour that they may not display at work I think it helps the department actually maybe reduce some barriers, maybe open an avenue of communication that wasn’t there before.”

Individual benefits

Employees benefited directly and indirectly through:

■ Appreciation for what one has.

“This kid who I saw [through volunteering] ... can’t move his hands, but he moves his arms. ... I will never feel sorry for myself after seeing what he has to go through.”

■ Reduced stress and a greater feeling of balance in one’s life.

“It enables you to forget your problems or concerns that you might have at the office and see that there’s something else besides the office.”

■ Increased contacts and establishment of personal networks.

“The people, the builders ... the trades that were there ... the people from Habitat for Humanity ... they send me e-mails all the time to let me know what’s going on and how things are progressing The people at Juvenile Diabetes and Run for the Cure ... if you need anything in that area ... you’ve got these people that you can call on now They are a real resource of people you can contact if you need to.”

■ Greater respect for those in need.

“It [volunteering] really did open my eyes I honestly [had] the idea that maybe these people really need the Food Bank because they can’t manage their money or they didn’t study well enough in school ... and they got themselves into their own mess. Then we went to the Food Bank and the woman was telling us about ... the large industries in our area that just closed down Families that had jobs and kids in schools ... suddenly don’t have any income any more.”

Developing an Effective Corporate Volunteer Program

- Enhanced feelings of self-esteem and self-worth.

“After you’ve gone there [to volunteer] you feel good about yourself, you do feel like you had made a bit of a difference and there is I think a lack of that feeling from day-to-day work.”

- Personal growth.

“I’ve learned a lot about myself [and] what I have a passion for, because I’m more involved with other people. You also learn that you have it very good and that some people are pretty unfortunate.”

- Increased energy for work.

“When I come back to work [after volunteering], I’m pumped, I’m ready to go to work.”

- Feeling of having “made a difference” in people’s lives.

“It was an amazing feeling I can still remember when, after we’d finished the room, the positive feelings everybody had that they really made a difference in somebody’s life that day.”

- Commitment to volunteering in the future.

“I’m glad they did come out with the [corporate volunteer] program, because they’ve got me involved and interested You know, if I left Ford tomorrow, I would probably still go to Run for the Cure and Juvenile Diabetes and that type of thing.”

Community benefits

The community benefited directly and indirectly through:

- Enhanced sense of community.

“It brings unity to the community, whether it’s cleaning up a park that’s filled with litter or helping a local social group to go on a trip.”

- Improved environment.

“A lot of the groups ... clean up parks and do garden work and lawn cutting and work around houses.”

- Enhanced living for community members.

“It does a lot of good. I really felt like we helped a family by helping build their house. I really feel that we did something good for that organization and for that community and for one family.”

- Increased level of community volunteering.

“Now I go out and do what I can, but I also encourage family and others too. [It] makes me feel good to be part of an organization that is contributing back to the community and to do something valuable in a non-work setting with my work colleagues We interact on a different level when we’re out doing that. ... It brings us together as a work group As a departmental manager, I think that helps our performance back in the workplace.”

- Increased financial and other aid to community organizations.

“I’ve never donated to Oakland Regional Centre, [but now] as a result of volunteering there ... I do make donations Also, every year at Christmas they look for volunteers to buy Christmas gifts for some of the residents. So I’ve participated in that and that’s a direct outcome of having volunteered there.”

Evaluation

It is important that your corporate volunteer program is monitored and periodically evaluated to identify which aspects of the program are working well and any aspects that need improvement. This can involve anything from simply gathering information on participation rates and number of hours contributed to the community to a more detailed study of the

impact of the program on the community, the employee volunteers, and the company. One useful resource that provides guidance on how to evaluate your corporate volunteer program is *Building value: The corporate volunteer program as a strategic resource for business* (1999), available through The Points of Light Foundation's catalogue division, 1-800-272-8306.

Conclusion

Corporate volunteer programs are becoming more and more common as companies strive to gain a competitive edge, satisfy company stakeholders (e.g., employees, investors, and the community), and demonstrate their sense of social responsibility by giving back to the community. By interviewing over 100 Ford of Canada employees, we learned a number of lessons that we have outlined in this manual. To implement a successful corporate volunteer program, a company must communicate the program effectively

to its employees, support their decision to participate, offer volunteer opportunities that employees find interesting and rewarding, and monitor the program in a systematic fashion. This will maximize the likelihood that the employees, the corporation and the community will all experience positive outcomes, and that employees will make a lifelong commitment to volunteering. Finally, corporate volunteer programs lead to a web of interrelated benefits for employees, the company, and the community.

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- Rostami, J., & Hall, M. (1996). *Employee volunteers*. Toronto: Canadian Centre for Philanthropy/Conference Board of Canada.
- Vineyard, S. (ed.). (1996). *Best practices in workplace employee volunteer programs*. Washington, DC: Points of Light Foundation.

Web Resources

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| Business for Social Responsibility | www.bsr.org |
| The Canadian Centre for Business in the Community at the Conference Board of Canada | www.conferenceboard.ca/ccbc |
| Canadian Centre for Philanthropy | www.ccp.ca |
| The Centre for Corporate Citizenship at Boston College | www.bc.edu/bc_org/avp/csom/ccci/index.html |
| The Corporate Citizenship Company | www.corporate-citizenship.co.uk |
| Corporate Volunteerism Council — Twin Cities | www.cvctc.org |
| Imagine | www.imagine.ca |
| National Retiree Volunteer Coalition | www.vancouver.volunteer.ca/business/nrvc.asp |
| National Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating | www.givingandvolunteering.ca |
| NonprofitsCan.ca | www.nonprofitscan.ca |
| The Points of Light Foundation | www.pointsoflight.org |
| Statistics Canada | www.statscan.ca |
| Volunteer Calgary | www.volunteercalgary.ab.ca |
| Volunteer Canada | www.volunteer.ca |
| The Volunteer Centre of San Francisco | www.vcsf.org |
| Volunteer Vancouver | www.vancouver.volunteer.ca |