

The business case

Employer supported volunteering for small and medium-sized companies

Why set up a programme?

Volunteering in the local community is an essential part of life for 58 per cent of the population¹ and many businesses are involved in the community for philanthropic reasons.

But research also supports the view that having an employer supported volunteering programme is good for business.²

Despite the growing pressure on resources which many small and medium-sized businesses face, an employer supported volunteering programme can bring considerable benefits.

Companies with employer supported volunteering programmes find that:

- employees are proud to work for them
- potential employees want to join them
- customers feel good about buying from them
- partners want to work with them
- investors want to invest in them
- local strategic partners welcome them to their area.

Whether as a company you support existing volunteering or develop your own programme, employer supported volunteering can bring benefits to the company, the employee and the community. It is a win-win situation.

“As a representative of 25,000 small and medium-sized firms across the UK, the Forum of Private Business (FPB) wholly recommends volunteering... It doesn't have to cost much, but the benefits – for both the businesses and their respective communities – can be significant.”

Phil Orford, Chief Executive, FPB

¹ From the 2007 *National survey of volunteering and charitable giving* by the Institute for Volunteering Research and the National Centre for Social Research.

² *Business in the Community/Research International New findings on the business case for community investment*, 2008.

Benefits of employer supported volunteering

Recruiting and keeping the best

A vibrant employer supported volunteering programme can contribute to improved employee perceptions of the workplace as well as higher levels of motivation and retention. Companies increasingly communicate employer supported volunteering alongside other benefits such as pensions, health insurance or interest-free loans for travel to work season tickets.

A survey in 2007 found that 54 per cent of employees who did not have access to a company volunteering or giving scheme said they would like their employer to have one.³

“Our HR Director says that when she mentions our community programme the interviewee’s eyes light up.”

Small architectural and design consultancy

A skilled workforce

Modern businesses need a highly skilled workforce. Training courses, team away days, and social events are necessary elements of a business that values its workforce. But they can be costly.

Employer supported volunteering provides an opportunity to develop a wide range of skills and competencies and can be an ideal complement to formal training.

Employees can develop better communication and team working skills through volunteering. Volunteering can give them an opportunity to lead projects and have responsibility for managing others sooner than might be possible in the workplace. It can also expose them to a wider range of tasks than they might get in their day jobs, including planning, budgeting, staff and time management and evaluation.

Meanwhile, community team challenge events provide the opportunity to build teams and new social relationships while helping the community.

Some 78 per cent of respondents cited being “inspired in my job” as their main motivation for work compared with 22 per cent who cited pay.

Reed Survey of 5000 employees 2008

Creating marketing and PR opportunities

A volunteering programme can provide increased visibility for a business in its local community and generate positive media coverage. For example, employer supported volunteers are company ambassadors and can enhance the reputation of their company in the community. As a result of the improvement in its image the company may also win new clients.

Volunteering has also been known to spark ideas for new services and products.

Some 88 per cent of consumers said they would be more likely to buy from a company that engaged in activities to improve society.

UK Small Business Consortium 2006

Reputation and credibility

All major political parties place strong emphasis on employer supported volunteering programmes⁴. By being proactive in this area a business communicates a willingness to co-operate with government and it can be helpful in building a positive profile with local authorities.

“We have won a number of bids in which our corporate social responsibility policy was identified as a strength in our response or as a differentiator.”

Medium-sized management consultancy

³ From the 2007 *National survey of volunteering and charitable giving* by the Institute for Volunteering Research and the National Centre for Social Research. ESV is now also a factor in the Sunday Times *100 Best Companies to Work For*.

⁴ www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/thirdsector

In conclusion

Employer supported volunteering is continuing its rapid rise up the business agenda. Through a volunteering programme a business can make a real difference to communities in which it operates. The reputation of the business will benefit and employees will feel more motivated. All of which can have a positive impact on profits.

For more information about how to get started, read our comprehensive beginners' guide on this website.

“Some of the best days of our year are working with local businesses.”

Spitalfields Crypt Trust

“Over the past few years we have received practical, professional and financial support from participating companies...

This generous support has helped us to be transformed from a building site to a business award winner.”

Karibu Education Centre



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“The British Chambers of Commerce supports employer supported volunteering and recognises the benefit it can bring business.

It can help raise profiles, reach new markets, recruit the best employees and influence government.”

David Frost, Director General, British Chambers of Commerce