

Wrap-Up from Spring 2015 Quarterly Meeting “50 Shades of Volunteering: When Traditional Just Isn’t Enough” Exploring Non-traditional Volunteering Ideas

This meeting offered CVC members and member partners a chance to share best practices for non-traditional volunteering through facilitated discussions. Guests were seated at 5 different tables, and each table had a discussion leader. Each group was given a different scenario, and they had to come up with recommendations for how their mock company could build/improve its employee volunteer program (EVP), CSR and/or civic engagement efforts.

Bob’s Hamburgers (Discussion Led by Michelle Prater, United Way of Greater Atlanta) – Quick Service Restaurant (QSR) with 70,000 employees, 350 employees work at headquarters in Atlanta with the remaining employees working in the field and ranging from hourly restaurant staff to salaried regional management.

The group recognized that this company’s primary challenge is the disjointed workforce. Volunteerism can be a great way to build relationships and company cohesiveness! The group recommended:

- 1) Play on strengths – Bob’s can donate food for a high-profile local event or employees could serve food at a homeless shelter. Everyone needs food, so giving away product will go a long way.
- 2) Build recognition – Employees could participate in local races or civic events and wear company t-shirts with EVP logo/theme. Local restaurants can also sponsor school or nonprofit organization “spirit night” fundraisers. Bob’s could act as a drop-off point for drives, support school cooking clubs,
- 3) Leverage employee skills to make a difference – Different departments could do skills-based workshops for nonprofits such as HR, IT, financial training, etc.
- 4) Creativity is key – Because the workforce is so big, it is important to explore different types of activities and see what appeals most to employees.
- 5) Keep Momentum – Ask employees to share “volunteer minutes” at staff meetings and set cultural expectations for giving back and participating.

Sample Project Ideas:

- Package meals for nonprofits onsite
- Make placemats for Meals on Wheels
- Write letters to veterans and encourage customers to participate
- Let nonprofits use Bob’s restaurants for events and meetings
- Write letters to children at Title 1 school
- Host a Build-a-Bear event and then donate bears to local children’s hospital
- Organize “pie in the face” events to create fun and raise funds for nonprofit partners
- Serve as drop-off point for clothing and toy drives
- Host “global day” and invite young people to come to Bob’s to learn about different cultures represented by employees.

TIMS Shoes (Discussion led by Kristie Madara, UCB) – Manufacturing company - 250 employees - 150 of them work on the line and only have one hour for lunch/50 are Sales and are on the Road/20 in Call Center/30 Management

Because of the lack of mobility for many of TIMS employees, volunteering in place is a key strategy. Additional suggestions include:

- 1) Volunteering should fall heavily on weekends. This gives all employees an equal chance to participate.

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2) TIMS should implement Corporate Values Volunteerism or “on the clock” volunteer hours. The group recommends 8-32 hours paid for volunteering/per employee per year.

3) Volunteering should be leveraged for team building. Because of the variety of positions within the company, bonding between offices is important.

4) Consider volunteer opportunities that can be managed remotely (at each facility) such as serving as a call center for a nonprofit that is under-resourced. Ex. Alston + Bird receptionists won an IMPACT Awards for fielding calls for the Georgia Senior Legal Hotline.

5) Evaluate employee preferences – TIMS should ask employees how they would like to volunteer. Asking for feedback helps engage more volunteers and makes employees feel appreciated.

Sample project/philanthropy ideas:

-Participate as a company in Hands On Atlanta Day. Team building, and ability to accomplish a lot with a large group.

-Support the Goodwill Mobile Call Center

-Host Boys & Girls Club clients and staff for a bowling outing.

-Collect supplies for Families First. Make it a competition to see who can contribute the most from a list of needed items. Award prizes!

-Write letters of appreciation to teachers at partner schools. This can be done remotely and boosts school morale.

-Host a shoe or suit drive for Dress for Success.

-Participate in the Shoebox Project each Spring for United Way. Shoeboxes can be assembled over a lunch break or after hours in a fun environment. Dave & Busters. Break room. Wherever the project happens – good feelings will happen, too!

-Have employees paint a mural for the Foundation for Hospital Art. This can be done whenever employees have time. Set up materials in break room and let employees participate as they are able.

Global Tech Masters (Discussion led by Cheryl Naja, Alston + Bird, LLP) - Global Tech company - 4,200 employees - Headquarters in US but company touches 10+ other countries across the globe

Employee opportunities will not be one-size fits all. It will be essential to have an ambassador at each company site around the globe. This will help employee volunteer opportunities reflect the local communities and make the greatest impact. Employee volunteerism is familiar in the US, but this may not be the case everywhere. Here are some other thoughts:

1) Consider a global volunteerism day. This would unify the entire company.

2) Ask employees worldwide what topics interest and matter to them. Then, build on these suggestions.

3) Consider having the entire company rally around an international cause.

4) Show that you appreciate the work that is already being done by collaborating with any current efforts.

5) Leverage nontraditional resources for volunteerism. Connect projects with corporate offices for convenience.

6) Utilize technology to bring champions together.

Sample project ideas:

-Data challenges or app creation. Host a hack-a-thon or an internal contest for the most popular proposal.

-Host a global volunteer day. Everyone volunteers at same time, so be aware of time zones.

-Support an international organization like UNICEF. Host volunteer education programs around the world.

-Use Skype for tutoring, classes, reading, and to bring champions together.

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Manifesto (Discussion led by Kisha Stanley, United Way of Greater Atlanta) – Boutique PR Firm - 15 employees - All employees are Atlanta based, minimal resources, no formal EVP program or focused giving areas. Mid-sized Atlanta companies are their clients.

The group noted that building buy in from all levels of the organization and defining business case for volunteerism is key. Here are some specifics:

- 1) Build Buy-In – Civic engagement leaders must engage senior leadership to ensure buy-in and future support. Start with HR! Volunteer project leaders should present the case to senior leadership, emphasizing benefits to company, employees and community.
- 2) Survey employees – Company could survey employees to find out their civic engagement preferences. Then, company can schedule quarterly volunteer opportunities and keep up the momentum.
- 3) Recruit Partners – Company can scan vendor lists, learn about any community involvement they may have, and look for strategic alliances. Then, company can possible organize a volunteer day and invite vendor participation.
- 4) Recruit from within – Are there employees who are already invested in the community? Make them your ambassadors! Ask them to provide testimonials about why volunteering matters and share. Ask them to help recruit other employees/resources to help.
- 5) Think about Millenials – Younger employees are looking for experiences not stuff. Think about virtual volunteering opportunities and ask for their input.
- 6) Pick an EVP Theme – Having a theme will help align all civic engagement efforts with business strategy.
- 7) Build In-House Volunteering Opportunities – Perhaps employees can create “build-a-lunch” kits for an organization in need. This would maximize time of employee volunteers and would align with business. Company could bring in an organization to talk about why their mission/the company’s support matter.
- 8) Educate – Company should start and finish every project by sharing why they are investing in the work they’ve selected. They can also recognize partners and collaborators. They should measure and report true end results.
- 9) Consider “Perks” – Consider paid time off for employee volunteering, grants for nonprofits supported by employee volunteers, etc.

Sample project ideas:

-Employees could create videos for organizations and have a social media contest to determine a winner. The winning video would garner \$5,000 for that employee’s charity of choice.

-Create care kits for a local nonprofit. The PR firm could partner with a local school to decorate bags and then employees could fill bags during lunch break. This would add the additional layer of a school partnership while maximizing time spent by employee volunteers.

Northstar Bank (Discussion led by Deidra Stewart, Accenture) - Midsize Regional Bank - 300 employees - 50 people at Atlanta headquarters, remaining are in 5 other southeast cities with 13 branches in total. Employees get a one hour lunch and cannot leave the office during work hours.

Northstar has the challenge of engaging employees statewide with limited ability to leave the office. The team proposed a mix of traditional/nontraditional civic engagement activities:

- 1) Create a regional contest with a partner to raise funds or resources – offer incentives to employees who participate
- 2) Host regular on-site volunteer projects (quarterly) that give employees a chance to engage.
- 3) Consider virtual volunteering – Employees could host virtual meetings or webinars which help educate nonprofit partners on the topics of financial services, budgeting, college funding, etc.
- 4) Volunteer via Facetime – Employees across the state could leverage this tool to support students, clients, etc.
- 5) Embrace individual volunteerism on company time - consider allocating a set number of volunteer hours/year.

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Sample projects ideas:

- Coat or can drive for a nonprofit partner.
- Have employees package back-to-school back packs for students, new homeowner baskets, sack lunches or personal care kits for populations in need.
- Leverage employee talents like knitting or painting to create useful and/or inspiring contributions for nonprofit partners. Knit hats for babies at a local shelter. Paint art for a residence home or hospital.
- Host webinars on how to open a bank account, how to apply for college funding, how to design a winning resume, etc.
- Help a child with their homework via Facetime
- Help a nonprofit organize photos (remotely)

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