

9 Expert Tips

for Developing an *Employee Volunteering Programme*



If you are looking to develop your employee volunteering programme and want to learn from the experience of others, then this simple and practical guide will help you be successful and avoid common mistakes.



Employee Volunteering Specialists

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Developing an Employee Volunteering Programme

Whether you are just setting up an employee volunteering (EV) programme or it has been going for 40 years these 9 expert tips will help you to be successful. Benefit from the learning of experts so you do not repeat mistakes others have made to ensure your EV programme delivers impact for your company and the community.

These recommendations will help save you money, better engage your staff and develop your business.

Works4U is a not-for-profit UK employee volunteering expert and has supported hundreds of businesses and thousands of employee volunteers.



1. *Culture First, Technology Second*

The number one reason that employee volunteering programmes get limited traction or fail completely is due to a technology first or technology led solution

To have a successful EV programme, you need to establish or develop a 'culture of volunteering' and you cannot achieve this by simply implementing a platform. "If you build it, they will come". No, they won't.

First you need people resources to inspire, encourage and share successes of volunteering. Good practice will be to identify internal champions who can help build this new culture.

Every business is different and so every culture of volunteering will be different.

Technology can really help your EV programme but only once you have established a culture.

2. *Walk before you can run*

The second most common reason employee volunteering programmes struggle to get off the ground, is when companies get too ambitious in the early development

Developing an employee programme is not the same as implementing a new IT system. You need to take small steps to get a good foundation for growth. EV programmes are about introducing a new culture to your organisation where employees participate through their free choice (see tip #8) and you need to grow this carefully for it to be successful.

For companies just starting in this area, it is recommended to give yourself at least two years to get an effective EV programme established before growing and developing it further.

3. *Quality over quantity*

EV programmes that focus on impact and demonstrate the difference made by the volunteering will be more successful and sustainable. Just like in other areas of your business, you need to continuously evaluate your EV programme to adapt and improve it.

1,000 hours of volunteering with little or no impact is less helpful than 100 hours of volunteering with impact. The former will leave staff disengaged whereas the latter will engage, motivate and develop staff. Successful EV programmes have impact at their core to ensure volunteering benefits the business, its employees and society.

With employee volunteering programmes, volunteer hours is vanity, volunteering culture is sanity and impact is king

4. *Engaging with community organisations*

An area that often causes issues for companies is engaging with charities and community groups. This can be a surprise as these organisations need volunteers and businesses are providing the volunteer help, so it should be easy? No, there are things you must consider.

Although community organisations receive regular support from volunteers, these will not be employee volunteers, i.e. working with employee volunteers will be unusual and difficult for them compared to their regular volunteers.

For example, assessing and organising a team volunteering project for a specific number of volunteers for a specific small amount of time is difficult to get right for both companies and community organisations. Consider using an expert broker who does this all the time to ensure your volunteers maximise their time and impact. Brokers come in different guises, from simply connecting you to a community organisation to a fully managed service where they organise the day on your behalf.*

The act of volunteering should not have a cost, but the work of organising for the volunteering to take place does have a cost. For example, organising a team volunteering project for 30 volunteers is like organising an event with lots of variables and risks to manage. This is why community organisations or brokers will charge, to cover their organising time and for material costs.

5. *Recognition of volunteers*

It is standard volunteer management best practice to recognise the work and contribution of volunteers. However, many businesses fail to do this.

If you want to develop an employee volunteering programme, you need to build in recognition processes. This must be a key fundamental of your programme. Whether it is just a simple thanks and/or a follow up to show the difference and impact their volunteering made, it makes a real and significant difference.

The act of recognition can be simple and quick so it is an easy win to leverage its positive effects. Firstly, the volunteer will feel good about their volunteering and will be much more likely to volunteer again. Secondly, communicating recognition of volunteering to staff, including those who did not volunteer, will encourage others to volunteer.

How you want to recognise volunteers should align with the culture of your business. From formal volunteer awards, to integration into appraisals and social/informal events, there are a huge range of options to carry this out.

6. *Don't forget the business reasons for having an EV Programme*

If a business is implementing an employee volunteering programme as a 'tick box exercise' or views it as a 'nice to have' then its success and impact will be limited. Employees will realise pretty quickly if a business does not really have its heart in such activity.

There are sound business reasons for having an employee volunteering programme, which include but are not limited to:

- Talent acquisition – draw in good people through promoting your impactful employee volunteering programme
- Talent retention – reduce staff turnover costs, through engaging your staff in an EV programme
- Develop skills – employee volunteering can allow your staff to develop their skills in new environments
- Team and culture building – EV programmes are a great way of building teams and work culture
- Demonstrate your CSR/ESG credentials to clients, partners, stakeholders and supply chain through your EV programme

7. *The right personnel*

However your business organises and carries out its employee volunteering, you need to have the right people leading it. Pretty obvious right? However, many organisations fall down in this area as either they have not recognised their strengths and weaknesses or their set up is not right, e.g. this activity is tacked onto someone's job role who does not normally do this.

How businesses operate this activity varies enormously, for example, from being within their HR function or the marketing and PR team, a dedicated community team (or an internal resource team of interested employees) or a senior level champion. However it is carried out, consider whether you have the skills, knowledge, experience, contacts and capacity to deliver a volunteering project or programme.

The key for success is recognising your own strengths and weaknesses which will determine whether you need external support or not

Many businesses have come to us for help after trying to deliver employee volunteer projects themselves and getting poor feedback from employees as they found it difficult to find and organise an impactful activity for their staff.

8. *Keep volunteering voluntary*

Another area that companies fall foul of is to make participating in volunteering events mandatory or obligatory. We see this most with companies who have their global day of volunteering and some volunteers tell us that they 'had to' participate rather than that they chose to.

It is good practice to encourage and prompt employees to consider volunteering but to force them or make them feel they are obliged to can be counter-productive. Their heart will not be in it and unless you can show the real difference and impact the volunteering makes, it

may create a cynical view about why the company is doing it.

Giving your employees choice and free will to participate will achieve more motivated volunteering and deliver greater impact.

"It's a bit like herding cats isn't it?" Is one question we had from someone trying to develop their EV programme. How do you herd cats? Get a few cats to participate and when the other cats see the benefit they are getting they will begin to follow as well.

9. *Don't deviate*

Even if you know all the good practice in delivering successful employee volunteering programmes, sometimes it can be difficult to resist the influences and pressures from both within and external to the business that may cause your programme to falter

All parts of a business must be prepared to adapt to the immediate pressures and environment it may face, but whoever leads the employee volunteering programme cannot let it permanently change away from its fundamental approach and good practice.

Sometimes programmes start with great intentions and plans, but there are changes in personnel, new business priorities and there is no one to ensure the programme does not lose its way.

Maintaining management buy-in and remembering the very sound business reasons for having an employee volunteer programme (see tip #6) is important for keeping your employee volunteering programme on track.

Works4U can help you develop your EV Programme

We hope that these tips are helpful and make clear that this work is not rocket science, but yet many businesses fall down in these areas.

Works4U is a UK-leading international EV expert and a not-for-profit social enterprise. We offer tailored advice and support to help make your EV Programme a success:

- Connect you to local brokers who can find and help deliver EV projects
- Ad hoc consultancy – from telephone support to bespoke consultancy projects, we're here to help you
- Partnership – we can act as your official EV programme delivery partner and we will work with you every step of the way to achieve your goals
- Outsourcing – outsource your EV development to Works4U and we will take responsibility for implementing and developing your programme



Employee Volunteering Experts

Works4U are internationally recognised experts in employee volunteering both in delivering employee volunteering community programmes on behalf of global corporations as well as helping them internally to develop EV programmes.

Works4U has been invited to the United Nations on several occasions, representing the UK, to lead and facilitate discussions of how businesses can help deliver SDGs through EV and social responsibility programmes.



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