

4. Volunteers

4.20 Employer Supported Volunteering

Introduction

There is a growing interest and encouragement from government for companies and public sector organisations to support their local communities. Employer-supported volunteering is one way of doing this alongside other initiatives (e.g. charity of the year fundraising and donations, payroll giving and providing meeting rooms and other gifts in kind to third sector groups.)

There are many types of employer-supported volunteering (ESV) programmes to assist employees to volunteer, both in their own time and in work time.

Different approaches to ESV

Different employers will choose different approaches (or a combination of approaches) to support their staff to volunteer, depending on their organisational culture and business needs. Some approaches are described below. All are valuable.

- **Using professional skills**

Offering your professional skills to a third sector organisation can be an invaluable benefit to that organisation. Volunteers can get involved in, and resource valuable developmental projects.

Whilst providing the volunteer with experience which can enhance their skills and understanding of the third sector or interest group, the receiving project has an appropriately skilled person to work on projects they may otherwise not be able to resource. Potential projects could include feasibility studies, community consultations, marketing plans, or event planning.

- **One-off team events**

Team volunteering events are organised in partnership with a third sector organisation (or a school or hospital), for example painting and decorating, gardening or conservation and environmental activities. Less traditional activities include building and testing emergency shelters for use in disaster zones, organising an 'introduction to the workplace' day for students with a sight impairment, or organising charity fundraising activities.

The 'host' organisation benefits from seeing a project undertaken and completed. Team members and employers benefit too, from team building, new insight and the satisfaction of having accomplished something new.

- **Mentoring**

There are many established mentoring schemes which require volunteers. These include schemes working with offenders, unemployed/economically inactive people, young people starting up in business and in schools. Mentoring helps volunteers to develop their coaching and listening skills, as well as having a huge benefit for the 'mentees'.

- **Board membership**

Volunteers serve on boards of schools, public involvement projects or on the management committee of a third sector organisation. Board membership provides the opportunity to apply skills and experience to a totally new environment and context. Being a trustee can also help to build social contacts, broaden experience and develop new interests

The Business case

Many employers have found that supporting their staff to volunteer has benefits for all concerned:

- **Benefits to the community**

- Skills and resources of employees can help to support projects and initiatives
- Increase in the pool of volunteers available
- Building links between the employer and the community

- **Benefits to the employee**

- Employees can use their existing skills to support a community project
- They can also develop new skills and have different experiences
- Have the opportunity to perform a wider range of tasks than they have in the workplace
- New experiences and meeting new colleagues/contacts
- Better understanding of a related/client sector

- **Benefits to the employer**

- Improved relationships with stakeholders, the local community and the wider community
- Motivated employees
- Opportunities for training and development outside of what is usually offered
- Fun way to develop staff and teams
- Good PR, maintaining a positive brand image

Issues to consider

Employer supported volunteering programmes need to suit the business needs and requirements of your organisation. Here are some key issues to consider :

- **Paid time off**

Some employers offer time off to their staff to get involved in voluntary activities. Others will not be in a position to offer this. Whatever the organisation decides, it is helpful to have a policy to make clear what the arrangements are.

For example do you:

- offer x number of days paid special leave per year to allow staff to volunteer
- ask staff to match their volunteering time e.g. one hour of their own time and one hour of paid time off
- encourage staff to volunteer but cannot offer paid time off so staff will need to volunteer in the evening or at weekends or book annual leave, or to make use of flexi- time arrangements

- **Insurance and health and safety**

Employer supported volunteers are covered by employment law when volunteering on an employer supported project (including off-site and out-of-hours volunteering). Employers have a 'duty of care' to reduce the likelihood of employees being harmed as a result of their volunteering activities. Employers will need to ensure that their insurance policy covers employees volunteering outside of their usual workplace.

All volunteering activities will need to be risk assessed. If you are working with a partnership organisation which arranges an activity for your staff, you need to ensure that the organisation carries out the risk assessment for you. Depending on your insurance arrangements you may also need to carry out a risk assessment.

For more information about health and safety and risk assessment see Information sheet [4.8 Keeping volunteers safe](#)

- **Recognition**

Some employers award certificates, write feature stories about volunteers in internal and external communication, hold volunteering awards or offer letters of thanks. This kind of recognition will show volunteers that they are appreciated and it can help to publicise the scheme and encourage others to get involved.

Some volunteers may not want too much public recognition and it is vital to check with the individuals concerned. Employers should also take care that they are recognising only volunteering that is employer-supported; some individuals

who volunteer in their own time will not feel it is any of their employer's business to celebrate their achievements.

Further information

Contact your local [Volunteer Centre](#) to find out more about individual volunteering opportunities in your area.

Individual volunteering opportunities are publicised on www.volunteering-wales.net

[Business in the Community](#) has information on the website in relation to employer supported volunteering.

The Welsh Government has a '[Guide to employee volunteering in the public sector](#)'

Disclaimer

The information provided in this sheet is intended for guidance only. It is not a substitute for professional advice and we cannot accept any responsibility for loss occasioned as a result of any person acting or refraining from acting upon it.

For further information contact

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