

Putting Equitable Corporate Volunteering Into Practice

Considerations and Checklist

As companies seek to achieve greater impact in the communities where they do business, applying an equity lens to their employee volunteer program is crucial.

By removing barriers to participation and ensuring equal opportunities, companies can empower all employees to contribute their skills and passions, enhancing engagement, promoting a positive workplace culture, deepening impact, and strengthening their reputation.

Considerations

Making your corporate volunteer program more accessible requires centering your design around your employees and their needs. There are several factors to consider, including the diversity of your employees and their accessibility needs, time flexibility, the cultural appropriateness of your volunteer opportunities, language accessibility, the level of agency provided for employees, and ensuring proper resource allocation. It is also essential to consider your company's business model and whether its operations impose potential constraints on your employees' ability to volunteer.

Below are some questions to consider as you assess your program.

01 REPRESENTATION

- Are you considering race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, age, disability, and socioeconomic status regarding who is able to volunteer?
- Do your volunteer opportunities appeal to and are accessible to employees with diverse backgrounds?

02 ACCESSIBILITY

- Does the volunteer program accommodate employees with disabilities or specific accessibility needs?
- Are the venues, materials, and activities accessible to everyone? If not, what must change?

03 FLEXIBILITY

- Do the opportunities accommodate different work schedules and personal commitments by giving multiple options for engagement?
- Do you have a mix of in-person and remote volunteer opportunities?

04 INCLUSIVITY

- Do you have a variety of volunteer activities offered that align with the diverse interests and skills of your workforce?
- Are there options that cater to different abilities, talents, and preferences, allowing employees to choose activities that resonate with them?

05 CULTURAL SENSITIVITY

- Are the initiatives designed respectfully and reflect the cultural values and norms of the communities you aim to serve?
- Have you engaged your ERG or Affinity Groups to ensure your volunteer opportunities reflect the cultural values and norms of those you seek as volunteers?



Considerations

06 LANGUAGE ACCESSIBILITY

- Are the volunteer toolkits, materials, and communications provided in multiple languages if needed?
- Have you verified that your employees can understand and participate in the programs regardless of their language proficiency?

07 EMPLOYEE INPUT & FEEDBACK

- Have you involved employees in shaping volunteer programs by gathering input on preferred volunteer opportunities and engagement methods?
- Do you have mechanisms to evaluate the effectiveness of volunteer programs in promoting equity and accessibility, and is participant feedback part of this process?

08 RESOURCE ALLOCATION

- Have you allocated sufficient budget, time, and support to create meaningful opportunities accessible to all employees?
- Have you had open communication with nonprofit partners that allows them to communicate honestly about the financial burden they feel to engage corporate volunteers?

09 BUSINESS MODEL & OPERATIONS

- Does your company have employee benefits such as Paid Volunteer Time Off that are not accessible to certain workforce members?
- Do part-time or non-exempt employees have the same access and opportunities to volunteer through company-sponsored programs?
- Does your company operate using a franchise model that creates barriers or prevents your volunteer programs from being executed in an accessible way in local markets?

Volunteering can be nuanced and often understood through the unique lens of one's life experiences. In addition to considering the above questions, it can be helpful to write out and communicate how your company defines what kind of activities do and do not as volunteering.



Defining Corporate Volunteering

Going beyond traditional, time and location-bound service to include virtual options and recognizing non-traditional volunteer service and employee-driven initiatives can make your programs more equitable and accessible. Recognizing non-traditional volunteer service and giving employees autonomy to organize volunteer projects fosters a sense of ownership and caters to a broader range of causes. Below are some considerations of what you might include.

FORMS OF VOLUNTEERING

INFORMAL VOLUNTEERING:

Activities that bypass formal institutions like nonprofits, government agencies, and education institutions, such as peer-to-peer, neighbor-to-neighbor, and family-to-family actions and support for grassroots causes.

PERSONAL VOLUNTEERING:

Non-company-sponsored or organized activities that may be personal, including but not limited to volunteering at a person's house of worship, a child's school, or a youth sports league.

WHY YOU MIGHT INCLUDE IT

INFORMAL VOLUNTEERING:

- Approximately 70% of the world's volunteering is informal, especially outside the Western context. Allowing these activities acknowledges and values contributions that may directly support one's community, even if not through a nonprofit.
- Giving time to advocate for change by taking part in peaceful acts of marching and protesting is a recognized form of support and change-making in many diverse communities and an act of giving one's time to advance social or environmental change.

PERSONAL VOLUNTEERING:

- Allowing employees to volunteer for activities most important to them demonstrates the company's commitment to its employees.
- Offering such opportunities can make volunteering more accessible to those who would not have time to support traditional time-bound activities.



Taking It Step-by-Step

Remember, implementing the checklist is an iterative process. Regularly reassess your program for gaps, implement changes, and adapt the checklist to your specific needs so that it remains relevant to you. Working to understand the operational boundaries of your company's business model, the motivations of your employees, and the barriers they face should be at the center of this process. Be sure to inform your employees of changes as you improve your program and gather their feedback to help you refine it. By sharing your learnings and promoting awareness, you can better engage employees and inspire continuous progress toward an equitable and accessible corporate volunteer program.

About the Author



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Jerome leads social impact at [The Uplift Agency](#), a sustainability and social impact consulting firm. With a passion for bridging the gap between companies and the communities they seek to serve, Jerome specializes in comprehensive strategy development, including signature philanthropic program design, equitable grantmaking processes, and impact toolkits for program optimization. He is also skilled at improving workplace and systems-level diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging outcomes.

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