

# Top Seven Trends Affecting Employee Volunteer Programs



Employee Volunteer Program (EVP) managers are charged with identifying and responding to EVP trends. EVP trends are defined as patterns of heightened attention by EVP stakeholders on items that affect EVPs. EVP trends have a palpable effect on the EVP manager's work by increasing expectations in certain areas, creating challenges, and exerting pressure to redirect efforts. Thus, it's important for EVP managers to stay informed of EVP trends to accomplish the following:

- Craft an EVP that takes advantage of the leanings in the external environment by, for example, reflecting emerging trends in the EVP's strategic plan
- Leverage trends to best support the EVP by, for example, focusing recruitment on skill-based volunteering if this interest is a trend among employees
- Stay ahead of expectations that business leaders or others might place on the EVP by, for example, being prepared to respond to a superior asking: "What are we doing around diversity and volunteering? I hear Aetna is combining the two quite effectively."



EVP trends can originate from such things as the demands of employees, concerns of business executives, visions of community leaders, initiatives of government officials, world events, etc. In sum, EVP trends can be almost anything and can come from almost anywhere, but they are likely to end up on the EVP manager's desk. A review of the literature indicates that the following are the top seven EVP trends.

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## Trend #1: Skill-Based Volunteering

With “extra-pair-of-hands” volunteering now well established in corporate America, the field has focused on leveraging employee skills and talents for the benefit of nonprofits. Indeed there is a need for this. A 2006 Deloitte / Points of Light Volunteer IMPACT study found that 77

percent of nonprofit leaders believe that skilled volunteers could significantly improve their organization’s business practices, yet only 12 percent of nonprofits actually put volunteers to work on such assignments. Furthermore, this study found that 40 percent of volunteers actively look for opportunities to apply their professional skills (Deloitte, 2006).

Executive board service has been a staple in employee volunteering for decades. However, the field is now finding more effective and creative ways to use employee skills and talents to serve communities. For example, rather than laying off executives for whom it had no immediate position, Starbucks loaned them to nonprofit organizations (Clark, 2006). Similarly, the Taproot Foundation brings together teams of employee volunteers for multi-month assignments in which they provide Marketing, HR, IT, or other professional services very much the same way as a consulting firm would.

## Trend #2: Rebranded Volunteering

The field is slowly recognizing that traditional stereotypes of volunteers limit employee volunteering. For example, many see the typical volunteer as a middle-aged motherly woman who is motivated by compassion. Thus, employees who are from different demographics or have different motivations may feel excluded from EVP communications. Therefore, some companies are trying to expand the image of the volunteer to include career-driven, young male professionals who are looking for adventure or meaning in their lives. Indeed, some companies have even taken this rebranding to external audiences. For example, Ralph Lauren’s GIVE and MINI Cooper’s MINI Motoring Hearts campaigns aim to create a more exciting, hip, and attractive image of volunteering.

## Trend #3: Disaster Response Volunteering

During the natural disasters of 2005, employees demanded meaningful employer-facilitated opportunities to respond, catapulting disaster response volunteering into the spotlight and making it a priority. In response, companies are currently developing a plethora of policies, procedures, and programming to support disaster response volunteering. Some companies, such as Bank of America, have integrated employee volunteering into their company-wide disaster planning.

## Trend #4: Diversity-Focused Volunteering

Corporate leaders have a renewed interest in corporate giving focused on racial, ethnic, and cultural diversity. In a survey of multinational corporations, respondents cited diversity most often as a corporate giving program area that will have greater importance in 2006 than in the past (Conference Board, 2006). For example, Aetna focuses a lot of its corporate giving, including its volunteering, on reducing racial and ethnic disparities in healthcare. This strategy promotes its aim to improve health while also developing Aetna's capacity to serve diverse populations, a key tenet of the company's growth strategy.

## Trend #5: Cause Leadership Volunteering

The role of corporations—including of their employee volunteers—in solving societal issues appears to be evolving from that of resource provider to that of leader. Researchers report that pioneer companies are sharing the driver's seat, rather than leaving the management of community programs to the nonprofit sector, as is traditional (Kramer and Kania, 2006). For example, British Petroleum has played a decisive role in the issue of global warming and GE is a key leader in developing strategies to improve healthcare in Africa. Under this paradigm, employee volunteers are no longer simply expected to perform the tasks that the nonprofit partner specifies, but instead to play a role in understanding the social issue, in strategizing solutions, and in developing programming.

## Trend #6: Business-Smart Volunteering

Linking employee volunteering to the business bottom line is not a new concept, but it continues to gather strength. A survey of multinational corporations found that nearly half of survey participants cited aligning their giving program with business objectives as the biggest change in their philanthropy in the recent past (Conference Board, 2006).

To stay ahead of this trend, consider participating in the Points of Light Foundation's one day seminar, *Developing Excellence in Workplace Volunteer Programs*.  
Learn more at:  
<http://www.pointsoflight.org/resources/training/workplace.cfm>



## Trend #7: Well-Measured Volunteering

Measuring the magnitude, effectiveness, and especially the impact of employee volunteering has been a top concern for business representatives for a number of years and it continues to be a priority. A Points of Light Foundation 2005 survey of its corporate members found that evaluation of employee volunteering was the greatest challenge for respondents (Points of Light Foundation, 2005). Similarly, The Conference Board reported that more than one-third of surveyed multinational companies reported that the biggest challenge they will face in managing their corporate contribution programs in 2006 is the measurement of results and outcomes.

To stay ahead of this trend, consider participating in the Points of Light Foundation's one day seminar, *Measuring Program Outcomes for Your Employee Volunteer Program*. Learn more at: <http://www.pointsoflight.org/resources/training/workplace.cfm>

### R e f e r e n c e s

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