



volunteer centres

Ionaid d'Oibrí Deonacha na hÉireann

IRELAND

employer supported volunteering

a step by step guide

Employee volunteering is a relatively new concept in Ireland, but for many years companies across the world have recognised their responsibilities to their stakeholders and the impact that they have on the local community through their Corporate Social Responsibility practices. These companies recognise that a prosperous, healthy and crime-free community benefits all who live and work there.



If you want to engage volunteers from companies in your area, you can identify which ones to approach by asking the following questions:

- Which organisations have a history of involvement in the community? More specifically, do any already have links with your organisation?
- Which company would be interested in what you could offer them?
- Which organisations have the skills you are looking for?
- Do you have a personal contact in any of these organisations?
- Which organisations have undergone a recent restructuring or have recently moved into the area that might make them keen to build links with the community?

Many companies have recognised the positive impact they can have on their community through their Corporate Social Responsibility practices.

step one plan & prepare

Before involving employee volunteers in your organisation you need to ensure you have the ability to manage volunteers within your organisation. It's worth asking yourself the following questions:

- Does everyone in your organisation agree that this is the right thing to do?
- Have any initial misgivings been addressed and resolved?
- Do you have enough resources?

Involving employee volunteers can take up a lot of time.

Are you fully prepared?

Thinking ahead about involving employee volunteers is essential. Take some time to think about the questions that a prospective business partner might ask you:

- What sort of volunteers do you need?
- What type of tasks could our employees do?
- What skills are needed, how much time will it take, where will the tasks be based?
- What benefits will it bring to both organisations?

If you can't or don't want to provide what the employee volunteer is looking for – a specific training need for example – then it is best to say so at the beginning. Remember employee volunteering should benefit all the parties involved.

step two make yourself attractive

Think about the volunteer opportunities you can offer that will attract employees. Organisations that are already taking part in employee volunteering programmes agree that volunteer-involving organisations should try to:

- Give first time volunteers one-off opportunities that enable them to test the water.
- Offer a variety of volunteering opportunities that can be undertaken at different times.
- Give employees opportunities to volunteer alongside their families.
- Offer opportunities that enable employees to work in groups with their colleagues and friends.
- Ask people to do a specific task or use a particular skill rather than making a general appeal for help.

Always be specific about the needs to be met and the time commitments involved.

step three follow good management practice

Managing Volunteers well is important in making the most of their time and skills, and to ensure a long running relationship with your partner organisation. The following steps will help:

- Make sure there is a clearly defined and worthwhile task for them to do and that volunteers have a role description.
- Remember that volunteers are motivated by tasks that:
 - Challenge them
 - Meet some of their own needs
 - Give them the opportunity to meet a real need in an effective way
 - Use their skills, energy and creativity
- Welcome the volunteers when they arrive. Take the time to show them around and introduce them to everyone. Make sure they know who they should contact if they have any questions or suggestions.
- Offer training and support. Employee volunteers may bring particular skills, but they are unlikely to have experience of your sort of work, so they will need some guidance. Ongoing support should also be available.
- Say thank you – both to the individual volunteers and to the organisations involved.

step four ask for and offer feedback

The company supplying employee volunteers needs to assess whether their employee volunteers involvement in the programme is worthwhile. They will need evidence, such as numbers of employees participating to prove to senior management that it is a success. No evidence may mean an end to their contribution. They also need to know if there are any problems, so they can avoid them in the future.

Ask them how they would like you to give feedback – ideally at the beginning of the partnership with them.

Always tell the volunteers and their employer how it has helped you. If they do not know whether they are making a difference they may not continue.

step five keep in touch and ask for more

Working with a private company partner should be seen as a long-term process. You are likely to get much more out of the relationship if you take the trouble to sustain it. Some simple suggestions on this are:

- Send updates on how your work is going – such as your annual report.
- Invite the employee volunteers to special occasions or events that you organise.
- Offer to visit the company to outline how your work is going.
- Acknowledge their support in your annual report or in any relevant press release and send them a copy.

Excerpts from; Employee Volunteering The Guide, National Centre for Volunteering UK

Your local volunteer bureau or centre will be more than happy to assist groups on an individual basis regarding issues related to employer supported volunteering and can be contacted at the following address:

Volunteer Centres Ireland is the national infrastructure of volunteer bureaux across the country and is supported by the Irish Government through the Department of Community, Rural & Gaeltacht Affairs.