

DESIGNING CORPORATE VOLUNTEER PROGRAMS TO CREATE VALUE

By Brenda Thickett

CORPORATE VOLUNTEER PROGRAMS CAN create significant value—for the causes served, the company sponsoring the programs, the employees who volunteer, and the nonprofits that participate. According to a recent BCG survey, members of the Millennial generation believe that working for social and environmental causes is an integral part of life, and they like to actively engage in cause campaigns by volunteering their time.

Many companies give back to their communities through corporate social responsibility (CSR) efforts, which can take many forms, ranging from foundations making monetary donations to nonprofits or social causes to corporations making gift-in-kind contributions of products or services. Other companies go even further, making their commitment to social causes, the environment, and the community an integral part of how they do business in every step of their value chain. Some organizations encourage their employees to get involved through corporate-sponsored volunteer activities—both locally and globally. These

volunteer activities can complement the company's broader social-impact efforts, connect to community outreach programs, and give employees an opportunity to see client-service organizations in action.

Building a Volunteer Program

What does it take to develop a volunteer program that engages employees and delivers ongoing value to both the corporation and the nonprofit partner? BCG's own experience indicates that the following four factors are critical to long-term success:

Set a clear mission and goals. What is the company trying to achieve with its volunteer program? Are there particular issues that connect to the core business or resonate with employees? For example, a toy company may choose to work with a child-oriented nonprofit, or an industrial goods producer might focus on the environment. A clear mission statement clarifies the purpose and goals of the program, what resources the company will

provide, and what guidelines will be followed. Making deliberate choices about what activities or causes the company will and will not contribute to is important.

Choose the right nonprofit partners.

After identifying the goals of the program and the issues to focus on, companies take the next step by selecting nonprofit organizations that meet these criteria. Identifying the best nonprofits to partner with is a matchmaking process—matching the skills a company has to offer with the needs of a nonprofit. As a management consulting firm, for instance, The Boston Consulting Group has found that it can help improve the effectiveness of nonprofit organizations by contributing consulting skills in such areas as strategy, finance, IT, operations, or change management. Companies should get to know potential partners and make sure that expectations are aligned. In our experience, long-term, strategic partnerships deliver the most value to a nonprofit, so corporations should choose a focused number of organizations to work with.

Support the program with dedicated staff.

Assigning dedicated staff to manage volunteer programs helps ensure that the volunteers' time is used effectively for maximum value to the nonprofit. It also sends the message that the program is taken seriously and professionally managed by the corporation. Focused resources also create awareness of the program, communicate volunteer opportunities clearly, generate enthusiasm, recognize those who participate, and celebrate the program's successes. In addition, dedicated resources also help build an internal knowledge base, stronger relationships with nonprofit partners, and program continuity over time. Staffing can consist of full- or part-time employees—depending on the size of the company and the scope of the program—and can be increased during slower periods of the year.

Develop a portfolio of volunteer opportunities.

To make volunteer activities available to all employees at every level of the corporation, the opportunities must utilize a wide range of skills and appeal to

a variety of interests. A broad portfolio of volunteer activities ensures that there is something for everyone, with options for varying time commitments. And since volunteering is an opt-in activity, the volunteering opportunities selected must be connected to employee interests. Conducting a survey of the staff is the easiest way to understand what people care about and how they want to contribute.

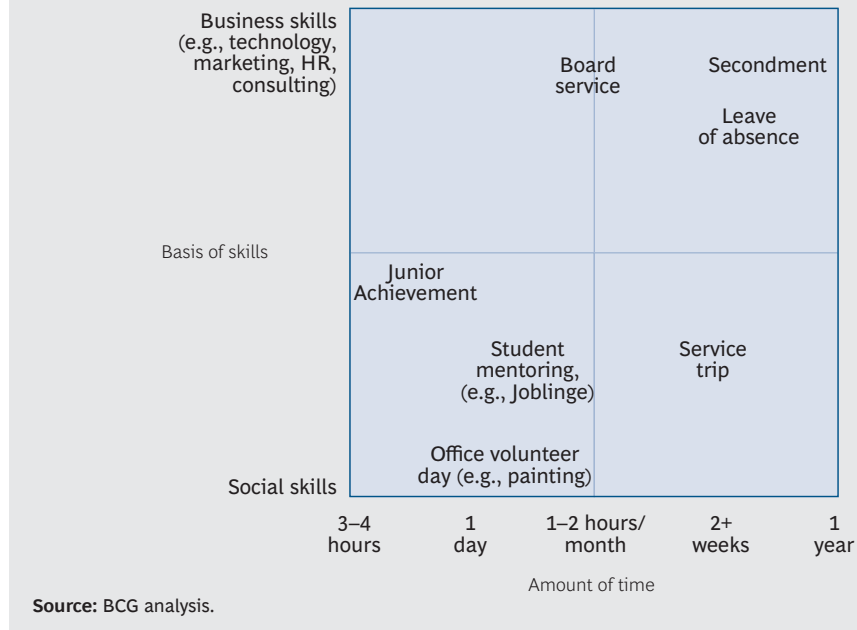
When setting up their volunteering programs, companies take a range of creative approaches to encourage employee participation while also creating value for the volunteers, the company, and the nonprofit. IBM's On Demand Community provides resources to make volunteering easy and accessible for current and past employees while leveraging the company's expertise in technology and other topics. It has developed a range of "activity kits" on technology-related topics such as Internet-safety coaching, hands-on science experiments, and engineering concepts. The kits include presentation scripts and directions that employees can download and present, making content accessible for use locally, as well as relevant to many different groups in the communities.

Microsoft's Volunteer Manager website matches the company's employees and alumni with local volunteering needs by offering a portfolio of opportunities. Nonprofits post their needs to the online board and employees select the activities that match their skills, time, location, and interests. The system lets employees search, view, and apply for activities, and record their volunteer hours.

Creating an Opportunity Portfolio

To develop a portfolio of volunteer opportunities, companies can use a matrix like the one shown in the exhibit "A Portfolio of Opportunities Makes Volunteering Accessible to All Staff," plotting activities on two dimensions: how skill-specific activities are and the time commitment they require. Ideally, the result will be a selection of opportunities that range from

A Portfolio of Opportunities Makes Volunteering Accessible to All Staff



activities that require social skills and only a short time commitment to those that require highly specific, often business-based skills and a long-term time commitment. On the one end of the spectrum might be cleaning up a camp for children with life-threatening illnesses; on the other, a secondment to work full-time for a nonprofit in a particular area, such as IT or change management—and everything in between. (See the sidebar “A Portfolio of Volunteer Activities at BCG.”)

By offering a range of short-, medium- and long-term opportunities in a variety of skill categories, companies can ensure that all employees can find a volunteer activity that fits individual interests and schedules. Some people will be interested only in one-time efforts such as the office coming together to help set up classrooms and prepare a school to open; others will want activities that require a few hours per week or month, such as mentoring students or becoming a board member for a nonprofit.

Still others will want to explore the social sector in greater depth, and there may be opportunities to take a leave of absence and volunteer on the other side of the world. At BCG, we have found this last

approach to be a very attractive program for our staff and a great value to the NGOs with which we partner. Pfizer’s Global Health Fellows program offers three- to six-month assignments that address a range of global health issues in partnership with development organizations in more than 40 countries around the world. The program gives Pfizer’s employees an opportunity to apply their skills in a direct way to help those in need.

The Intel Education Service Corps program enables teams of employees to spend two weeks in a developing country, installing Intel-powered classmate PCs. Working through local NGO partners, the teams install the rugged laptops designed for education and train teachers in their use. Through this program, Intel employees are working with their products in the field and using their specific skills to have an impact. Teams are formed from the staff around the world, and employees spend several months training for their roles. Didier Da Costa, a participant from Intel Ireland said of the program, “This was one of the best experiences I’ve had in my whole life.”

Collaborating with partner nonprofits, companies can develop different opportu-

A PORTFOLIO OF VOLUNTEER ACTIVITIES AT BCG

In addition to BCG's project-based consulting support for organizations in the social sector, BCG offers staff a portfolio of volunteer opportunities, which vary by office around the world. The following examples are a sampling of volunteer activities from a few offices:

One-Time Activities. Many activities requiring relatively little time are regularly available. These include contributing to seasonal food and gift drives, spending a day teaching students about business principles through Junior Achievement, and providing short-term support to social entrepreneurs.

Volunteering Days. Many BCG offices close for a day so that employees can participate together in organized volunteer activities with local nonprofits. Typical activities include painting or cleaning community facilities and helping at food pantries. For the last several years, our staff in Buenos Aires has collaborated with Un Techo para mi País, a Latin American philanthropy, spending a weekend working to build a house for a family in need.

Juan Manuel Valverde, a consultant in the firm's Buenos Aires office, said of his experience:

I had heard from multiple people how enriching and eye-opening the experience could be. It has a double benefit: on the one hand, we get to actually build a house for a family that is still living under a very precarious roof—often, one which leaks when it rains. On the other, we get to meet this family and work side by side with them.

The reality that they are facing day after day sinks in, in a way no article, picture, or video will ever fully convey. It is an amazingly satisfying experience to inaugurate a proper home together with the family by the end of the weekend.

This type of experience reinforces my belief that BCG and BCGers truly believe in changing the world. Mostly, we do this through what we do best: consulting. But when the opportunity presents itself, both the organization and each employee will go out of the way to effect change where it is most needed. It makes me proud to work at an organization that truly cares, deliberately takes concrete action, and leverages collective resources to effect change.

Ongoing, Monthly Activities. Many BCG offices organize recurring, monthly volunteer opportunities such as one-on-one mentoring of high school students.

Andreas Wilms, a consultant in BCG's Berlin office, reflected on his experience with Joblinge, a BCG initiative to support unemployed youths in developing skills and finding jobs:

Getting involved with Joblinge was an opportunity for me to apply not only my consulting skills but also my previous experience working with disadvantaged young people. Through working with Joblinge, I have learned to engage with a broad and diverse range of stakeholders—actually a broader and more diverse range than any I had experienced before.

Before I became involved with Joblinge, I knew about BCG's social impact activities. But I didn't know about the reason behind these activities. Now I know that it is not part of a marketing strategy but that the people in BCG are really convinced that these social activities are important and of value themselves. It is a good feeling to work for a company where social impact is "rooted in the heart."

Secondment or Temporary Transfer. Some of the company's employees are given the opportunity to join one of

A PORTFOLIO OF VOLUNTEER ACTIVITIES AT BCG (CONTINUED)

BCG's global partner organizations for up to one year at a reduced salary.

Michelle Bowman, a project leader in the firm's New York office, explained her experience on secondment with Save the Children International:

To me, a secondment represented an opportunity to have a positive impact on the world while continuing to hone skills that will be valuable at BCG and throughout the rest of my career. While on secondment, I have had the opportunity to contribute to an organization that is doing great work for the world—and I have greatly enjoyed my time there. At the same time, I have also developed skills that will be extremely valuable once I return to BCG.

Process design is much more real when you actually have to implement and live with the process moving forward. Organization design has a different impact when you are sitting in the office with the people you are moving around. This secondment has really made me appreciate the opportunities offered at BCG, and it has helped me understand that BCG truly does care about its staff and their development.

Vacation or Leave of Absence.

Employees can spend a week or two of their vacation time—or up to one year

on a leave of absence—working with a nonprofit on a wide range of issues from health care to economic development. BCG can help find an assignment or staff can identify the opportunity themselves in any country around the world. Recent assignments have included locations in Argentina, Chile, Cote d'Ivoire, Haiti, Italy, Rwanda, South Africa, Switzerland, Turkey, and Zambia.

Begona Llanderas, the office coordinator for the firm's Spain offices, commented on her experience with a BCG Iberia initiative that enabled BCGers to volunteer in an orphanage in Ethiopia for 15 days over the summer:

We took care of the children, from feeding and hydrating sick kids to playing with them. We also painted the walls in the bedrooms to make the place happier, and we helped with the cow "house." I learned a lot about the culture and values of a very different country.

The experience created a great bond within the group of BCG volunteers who shared very special experiences and moments.

nities to support both organizations, in mutually reinforcing ways, by drawing on the skills and availability of their employees. For instance, BCG's own San Francisco office has sent more than 50 volunteers to work with the Oakland Zoo on a wide range of projects. Groups of volunteers spent a day painting, feeding animals, clearing invasive species of plants on the grounds, and completing other activities. Another small team helped the organization improve its fundraising strategy over

several weeks, and another helped the Zoo restructure its education programs to complement the mission of the organization. In addition, a BCG partner serves on the zoo's Board of Trustees.

Wide-Ranging Benefits

From working in a soup kitchen to mentoring inner-city kids and from helping out on community service days to sitting on the board of a nonprofit, volunteer work is both

personally and professionally satisfying for *employees*. Activities such as these give employees an opportunity to use their capabilities in different contexts, develop new skills, and broaden their horizons. Corporate-sponsored volunteering also enables employees to work side by side with a wide range of people from both within and beyond the company. Sharing these activities with colleagues can strengthen employees' sense of connection and help them to collaborate more effectively back at the office. Volunteering can also be a developmental opportunity for the staff, stretching their skills in new environments and requiring more collaborative and consensus-building approaches. They then bring these skills back to their day jobs.

Volunteer programs provide a range of benefits to *corporate sponsors* as well. Companies are able to give back more broadly to the community and enhance their reputations locally. At the same time, they are providing employees with experiences that enrich their lives, increase their engagement, and strengthen their loyalty and retention. And because volunteer activities are opportunities that involve all functions and all levels of the organization, they offer greater accessibility and involvement than CSR programs, which typically involve a smaller number of people. Volunteering is also an effective team-building activity that can foster stronger bonds among employees, thereby strengthening the culture of the firm.

Finally, the *nonprofit organizations* that companies partner with achieve significant, continuing benefits from the programs. Besides additional manpower, skills, and donations, the nonprofits also gain long-term, supportive partners that develop a deeper understanding of their needs over time—and can increase the value of the corporate contributions as a result. Specific skills such as finance, marketing, or IT can also deliver more value to a nonprofit than cash. Having ongoing access to those skills—through board members with specific skills or temporary transfers such as secondments—can be invaluable.

CORPORATE VOLUNTEER PROGRAMS offer a wide range of benefits to companies, employees, and nonprofits. The key is to create a varied, equal-opportunity program that appeals to the diverse skills, interests, and availability of all employees at all levels of the organization. Making a difference in the world is something we all aspire to do, and volunteer programs provide an opportunity to make a contribution.

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The Boston Consulting Group (BCG) is a global management consulting firm and the world's leading advisor on business strategy. We partner with clients from the private, public, and not-for-profit sectors in all regions to identify their highest-value opportunities, address their most critical challenges, and transform their enterprises. Our customized approach combines deep insight into the dynamics of companies and markets with close collaboration at all levels of the client organization. This ensures that our clients achieve sustainable competitive advantage, build more capable organizations, and secure lasting results. Founded in 1963, BCG is a private company with 75 offices in 42 countries. For more information, please visit bcg.com.

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