

**a summary**

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employee  
volunteering  
the guide

Employee  
volunteering

# foreward

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Irv Robinson recognizes that the communities in which we live are an intricate part of our lives and the lives of our families. When people channel their idealism and energy into helping others and solving community problems, they build a new respect for themselves and a strong attachment to others. The Community Matters Team was set up to connect employees with volunteer opportunities and to help employees realize the benefits that employee volunteering can bring—to the company, to employees and most importantly to the communities in which they operate.

Employee volunteering is not new to Robbie. Since the introduction of the volunteer program at Robbie in 2005, the program has grown from 120 volunteer hours to 280 hours currently. But this is still just scratching the surface.

*Employee Volunteering*—the Guide is a central part of the Robbie Volunteer Program and will help us achieve our objective that employee volunteering should happen in all aspects of our communities and at every level of an organization. Its practical approach will help Robbie employees find the approach that is right for them. Volunteer-involving organizations will also be supported with advice and guidelines on what works best for our employees.

This booklet serves as a synopsis to the volunteer guidelines and activities at Robbie. I hope you will find this a valuable tool to help the employee volunteer program.

**Mae Sims**

Team Lead—Community Matters Volunteer Team

# introduction

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In the United States, around 61.8 million people, or 26.4 percent of the population, volunteered through or for an organization at least once between September 2007 and September 2008. Of this number of people, 44.3 million people, or 28.5 percent are in the civilian labor force. This benefit, not given by all employers, however, is increasingly supported at Robbie.

Why is this form of volunteering—employee volunteering—becoming increasingly popular? It's because everyone involved—the organizations that provide employee volunteers, the organizations where employee volunteers help out, the wider community and the employees themselves—has something to gain.

# the case for employee volunteering

## Employee volunteering and corporate social responsibility

All employers, whether they are a company, a public organization or a charity, have an impact on the community in which they operate. All of these are increasingly recognizing the importance of playing an active part in their local communities—a prosperous, healthy and crime-free community benefits all who live and work there.

Our organization can become involved in our local community in a number of ways. The main ones are:

### **1 Financial donations**

Donated money often backs up employee activity in the community, to help ensure that the projects they support are successful. Giving money now enjoys a number of tax benefits.

### **Tax benefits**

The government has introduced a number of tax benefits to encourage charitable donation, including:

- Gift Aid—tax deductible donations
- Tax relief on gifts of shares
- Tax relief on some sponsorship payments or gifts

See the Internal Revenue Service website at: [www.irs.gov](http://www.irs.gov) for more details.

### **2 In-kind support**

We can put to good use resources that our organization no longer needs, by donating such as furniture or computer equipment to local voluntary or community organizations.

### **3 Employee volunteering**

People giving their time and expertise to support projects of real value, to the community, can be the most effective donation of all. And the benefits aren't just one-way.

## Everyone's a winner...

### **Employers**

Employee volunteering helps employers to:

- Improve their public image. Customers, potential recruits and local people will see that organization as socially responsible and constructive. And employee volunteers make great ambassadors!
- Increase employees' commitment and motivation. Employees volunteering works wonders in strengthening team spirit and company loyalty.
- Enhance the skills of employees. They may get the opportunity to develop and practice a wider range of skills than they do in their paid work—especially teamwork, leadership, decision-making and communication.
- Improve levels of recruitment and retention—because employee volunteering creates such a positive culture.

- Innovate. Employee volunteering can give access to local networks and alliances, perceptions and problems, which can inform management decisions and help innovation.

### ***Employees***

Employee volunteering helps employees to:

- Build new skills and meet new people.
- Get the chance to make a difference to something they care about.
- Explore new situations and challenges.
- Add variety to their work.
- Change or enhance the way they feel about themselves and their employer.

### ***Organizations who use employee volunteers***

Employee volunteering helps voluntary and community groups to:

- Harness new skills, knowledge and energy. Voluntary organizations

are having to become more 'business like' to satisfy funders, so they can benefit from a greater pool of business skills.

- Gain a fresh perspective—from people who haven't 'always done it that way'!
- Have access to teams of volunteers who can plan and carry out major tasks. Voluntary organizations often have great ideas but lack the resources to carry them out.
- Improve understanding between themselves and the public and private sectors. This can lead to longer term links and access to more resources and support.
- Raise their profile. Involving employee volunteers automatically increases public awareness of their work.

84% of the public believe that knowing about a company's community involvement activities are important in forming an opinion of that organization. (Mori 1999)

# developing a successful employee

Our employee volunteer program should be managed like any other project: by setting clear objectives and by planning, delivering, evaluating and reporting on its success and failures.

## *If we would like our employees to volunteer*

### 1

#### Assess the current situation

It is important to find out first of all about the base we will be building on, so that we can monitor the success of our program at a later date. Questions to ask include:

- What community activity is already taking place?
- What internal structures can be used (ie, house newsletters, social clubs, etc.)

What help is available in the local community for establishing links with community organizations?

Surveys that ask for employees' private voluntary activities rarely go down well. Lets try alternative ways of gathering information such as:

- talking to key people such as team managers
- establishing a volunteer award scheme
- adding a few questions to a more general survey
- asking employees to nominate causes they would like to support

### 2

#### Assess the current situation

A written employee volunteering policy has several benefits, including:

- demonstrating that the employee volunteering program has support of senior management
- ensuring everyone knows the procedure involved
- including to employees that the program is taken seriously and is worthwhile

- highlighting the program—if you don't tell people about it, you don't get any credit for it.

A good employee volunteering policy will aim to meet the needs of both the supplier of employee volunteers and the receiver, and may include:

- a brief statement of commitment to employee volunteering and the reasons for that commitment
- guidelines on in-kind contributions
- Guidelines on financial support if this is to be linked to employees' fundraising or personal volunteering activities
- A statement on how projects are chosen and the level of employee involvement in this

### 3

#### Set objectives

Consider how our program will help to meet our organizational business aims

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or strategic objectives. We will also need to consider the objectives of the community partner we will be working with. Try to define jointly what we want to achieve and how to measure success. True partnerships are best achieved by working together from the start.

We may also want to talk to similar organizations that have already setup an employee volunteering program. There are several brokerage organizations that can help us with this.

See: [Volunteer Match](#)

It is useful to set objectives that relate to the impact we want the employee volunteering program to have, such as:

- improving employee morale
- transferring business skills to certain types of community organizations
- improving our profile in the community

- increasing employee retention

Make sure our goals are realistic. Most organizations looking for employee volunteering opportunities find that, with the exception of group projects, the number of volunteers for any one opportunity is small.

Decide how we will know if our objectives have been achieved, and make sure we keep records so that we can evaluate this.

If we want to improve an existing employee volunteering program, then it's easiest to set objectives in relation to the activities already under way. These might include:

- increasing the number of employees participating
- establishing a structure to enable activities to be organized more regularly
- increasing the variety of activities
- encouraging community organizations to contribute their ideas to the program

## 4

### Allocate resources

An employee volunteer program brings a lot of benefits, but they are not free. With our group of staff volunteers set up to run a committee, we need those involved to receive key training in volunteer management.

Some financial resources will also be needed, for example, to fund:

- match fundraising schemes
- marketing (promotional material such as posters and flyers)
- volunteer recognition awards

Using financial resources for volunteering may at first seem problematic. By using budgets creatively—training budgets for example—funds should be able to be found to cover costs.

# developing a successful employee

## 5

### Gain support

The employee volunteering program will need the support of the whole organization if it is to succeed.

#### *Securing the support of top management*

- Point to successful programs in companies that are in the same market area or similar public bodies. The Corporate Social Responsibility Agenda from RAND.org is a great resource for executives and senior managers to see employee involvement in action and discuss the benefits it brings. See: [RAND](#)
- Look for allies. There are sure to be managers who are already involved in community activities. Talk to them individually. Ask for their help in designing and supporting the program and using their influence to promote it.
- Start with a project that relates to our organizational priorities and

brings measurable benefits.

#### *Securing the support across the organization*

Middle management support is crucial to the success of our employee volunteering program, but the most difficult to gain. This is because middle managers are likely to be most affected by volunteering. They may simply see that their team is absent, rather than the benefits that volunteering will bring. Let's try to overcome this, we need to make sure there are no surprises. Explain:

- What the program is and how it will function
- The benefits it will bring
- How essential they are to the programs success
- How they can support the program
- That there are clear guidelines on such areas as use of facilities and paid time off.

## 6

### Consult and involve employees

For an employee volun-

teering program to succeed, it will have to be a shared one. Create ways to involve all our employees and enable them to feel ownership of the program. Involve them in generating ideas and organizing activities.

Base all our communications on messages that convey ideas of sharing, support and partnership. Listen to what our employees say. Which causes do they want to help? What kind of support do they want? What kind of recognition would they like? We can discuss in Community Matters meetings ideas and activities. We can also organize a community visit so employees can see first hand how they can help.

The aim is to show that the program is employee-led and employer supported.

### Two-way communication

- Are we sure that potential volunteers know what support is offered and who they can contact to find out more, or to suggest ideas?
- Are we listening effectively with our community partners—do they know what we are saying to our employees, and are we happy about how they are describing our involvement?
- Is the person responsible for the program always receptive to what people are saying, are they easy to reach, do they make time to listen properly and discuss?

## 7

### Recruit volunteers

By far the best way of recruiting volunteers is by word of mouth. Recruit ‘employee volunteering champions’ to spread the message to

their peers. Include profiles of employee volunteers in the company newsletter, or invite people from community organizations to come and speak to our employees about the difference their involvement could make.

### Recruitment tips

- Communicate personally rather than relying on written material, where possible
- Develop a distinctive identity for the program—perhaps involve employees in choosing a name and/or logo for it
- Try and ensure the volunteering opportunities are attractive and varied
- Explain exactly how the volunteers will make a difference
- Spell out what our organization is contributing
- Make it sound fun!

## 8

### Recognize

Recognizing and publicizing the contribution

that employee volunteers make will demonstrate to our employees that their efforts are appreciated—and will also help recruit more volunteers.

Ways of recognizing employee volunteers include:

- Internal award schemes
- Recognition events
- Articles in newsletters and magazines
- A personal thank you letter from the president or chief operations officer
- Presentation of certificates by our community partner

## 9

### Monitor and evaluate

Evaluation of our program is vital so that we can improve and build on it. Evaluation is also part of our communications strategy, and

# developing a successful employee

should be used both to inform our current program and to stimulate feedback about its future direction. And, perhaps most importantly, we may have to go ahead for now, but in the future there may be changes at the top of our organization that may change the backing for the program. So we must continually monitor and evaluate its impact to ensure long-term success.

## *Questions to ask*

Most of the benefits of employee volunteering programs are qualitative, so we will need to ask a variety of questions to help evaluate its success. Consider the results for everyone involved: our organization, the employee volunteers, and our partner organization and the wider community.

## *The effect on our organization*

- Was the volunteering enjoyable, and did it raise morale?

- Did it improve our communications and teamwork?
- Did it improve our community relations?
- Did it enhance our employees' skills?

## *The effect on the employee volunteers*

- Have they volunteered before?
- Did they think this volunteering was well-organized?
- Will they continue to volunteer? If not, why not?
- Did they feel their volunteering activity provided them with new challenges or development of new skills?
- Did they find it worthwhile?
- Did they enjoy it?

## *The effect on our partner organization*

We will of course need to liaise over this with our partner organizations, but our questions could include:

- Did the end result match the original aim of the project?
- How well-received was it?
- How well did your partnership work on a practical level?
- Were there any problems, and how were they dealt with?
- How can you build on what has been achieved so far?
- Have there been any measurable impacts on society, either to the end-users of the service, or to the wider community?

## *Methods to use*

Some of our aims may have been quantitative—i.e., we might have wanted to involve a minimum of 10 per cent of all employees—and these are easy to evaluate if we have kept good records. Qualitative benefits are more difficult to assess.

We could try using one or more of the following methods:

- asking for reports
- Questionnaires or surveys
- telephone conversations with participants
- interviews
- focus groups
- written records

#### The key factors in evaluation

- State clearly in advance what all the groups involved expect to gain from the project or program.
- Stay in touch with, and seek information from, all the stakeholders in the program.
- Set up record-keeping procedures to gather and store the information we need as we go along.
- Plan the evaluation, and the data you will need to collect, before the program begins or as soon as possible after it starts. Data-gathering is much easier to do as you go along than retro-

### If we would like to involve employee volunteers in our voluntary program

#### 1

#### Plan and prepare

Before involving employee volunteers in our program, it's worth asking ourselves these questions:

- Does everyone in our organization agree that this is the right thing to do?
- Have any initial misgivings been addressed and resolved?
- Do we have enough resources? Involving employee volunteers can take up a lot of work time, for example.
- Are we fully prepared? Thinking ahead about involving employee volunteers is essential. Take some time to think about questions that a prospective partner might ask you:
- What sort of volunteers do we need?

- What types 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 our organizations?

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

#### 2

#### Plan and prepare

Think about the volunteer opportunities we can offer that will attract employees. Organizations that are already taking part in employee volunteer programs agree that volunteer-involving organizations should try to:

# developing a successful employee

give first-time volunteers one-off, time-limited 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 employees 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 (‘please help the environment...’)
- Always be specific about the needs to be met and the time commitments involved.

## 3

### Follow good management practices

Managing volunteers well is important to make the

most of their time and skills, and to ensure a long running relationship with our partner organizations.

The following steps will help:

- Make sure there is a clearly defined and worthwhile task for them to do that there is a task description.
- Remember that volunteers are motivated by tasks that:
  - Challenge them
  - They help to create
  - Meet some of their own needs
  - Give them opportunity to meet a real need in an effective way
  - Use their skills and energy creatively.
- 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 our 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 organization involved. If we have a party or present certificates during Volunteers Week, for instance, make sure you include senior representatives from both organizations as well as the volunteers themselves.

## 4

### Feedback

The supplier of employee volunteers need to assess whether their employee volunteering program is

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worthwhile. To do this we need evidence, such as the number of employees participating, to prove to senior management that it is a success. No evidence may mean an end to their contribution. We also need to know of any problems, so we can avoid them next time around.

Ask them how they would like us to give feedback—ideally at the beginning of the program. Usually feedback is provided on:

- The number of volunteers taking part
- The number of hours worked
- What problems, if any, arose.

Always tell the volunteers and their employer how it has helped you. If they do not know whether what they are doing is making a difference,

they may not continue doing it.

## 5 Keep in touch and ask for more

Working with a private or public partner should be seen as long-term progress. We are likely to get much more out of the relationship if you take the trouble to sustain it. Here are a few simple ways of maintaining contact:

- Send updates on how our work is going—such as a copy of our annual report or some other information about the help we still need to partner volunteers
- Invite the employee volunteers to special occasions or events that we organize (i.e. to celebrate Volunteers Week).
- Offer to visit the or-

ganization to speak about how our work is going.

- Acknowledge their help in our annual report in any relevant press releases. Send them copies.

### If we would like our employees to volunteer

With all the support mechanisms in place, we need to choose what kind of program would be best suited to our organization and our employees. We will need to consider factors such as our organization's size, locality and culture, and the demographics of your employees.

Think about our existing relationship with the local voluntary sector. We have a few relationships with groups at this stage, but perhaps our organization needs to stretch past this and build closer relationships with other volunteer

# developing a successful employee

We may find that they are willing to build a closer relationship with us and share ideas for employee volunteering activities.

Or we may know of a local broker, such as the Volunteer Center of Johnson County, which has a 'Hands On Kansas City' corporate volunteer program. They can customize, hands-on group volunteer project that will incorporate team building, leadership development, and philanthropy initiatives. They will fully develop and coordinate all aspects of our company's volunteer project(s).

Most importantly, involve our employees in the discussions. They are involved with SafeHome, which is a benefit to us because we are already in a partnership with this organization. Listen to employee ideas and their reactions to our suggestions.

The main ways of approaching employee volunteering activity are shown in the fol-

lowing. The potential advantages and disadvantages of each are also shown, but it's important to remember that a properly planned and managed program can enhance the positive aspects while minimizing the possible pitfalls.

- **'Charity of the Year' Programs.** Our organization, prompted by employees, commits to supporting a range of volunteering activities, focusing on a specific organization.



Enables us to build long-term relationships with community organizations.



Can be seen as top-down choice, contrary to employee-led principal. May not have sufficient spread to create any informal PR.

- **Allocating work time.** Agreed allocations of work

time for volunteering activities, often matched to equal each employee's own time commitment.



Strong indicator of organization's commitment, and likely to make employees' decision to participate easier. Easy way of setting employee's commitment.



Can be difficult to sell to middle managers. Keeping track of the hours can be an administrative burden.

- **One-off 'Challenge events.'** A task usually practical, set by local community organizations. Can involve employees' family members, particularly when event carried out over a weekend.



Provides a good 'taster' for those new to volunteering. Brings practical resource to problems. Good for team

building and motivation.



Needs planning and managing, or can result in too many people with not enough to do.

Can be difficult to translate into a sustainable program after the first rush of enthusiasm.

- **Mentoring.** Provides the opportunity to develop interpersonal skills of coaching, listening and motivation through one-on-one relationships set up with clear guidelines as to purpose, limits, timescales and venue.



Effective means of skills development. Highly motivational because its positive effects on mentee are very visible.



Often employer-initiated. Usually limited to school or charity open hours.

- **Trustees and schools.** Volunteers, often bringing professional or managerial skills, serve on school boards or on the management committees of voluntary organizations. Enables them to experience the strategic management of a whole organization.



High community visibility. Gives good experience in management, decision-making and developing strategies and policy.



Difficulties can be caused by differences in organization culture.

Usually minimum one year time commitment. Effects can take a long time to show due to long intervals between meetings.

- **Development assignments.** Short placements in community organizations for either individuals or teams. Projects are clearly defined to meet the development needs of the employee or team—usually focusing on the skills of project management, confidence, negotiation and communication.



Proven vehicle for improving skills team-building. Enables clear targets to be set and measured. Participants report high degree of success and self-motivation.

# developing a successful employee



Again, an employer-led initiative. Middle managers can resist demands on work time. Care needs to be taken that participation remains voluntary.

- **Secondment.** Usually full-time and for a period of between six and 24 months. Can be used as a transition associated with early retirement or restructuring, or (less frequently) for mid-career management development.



A positive way of dealing with change for employees. Helps the secondee to develop new skills, and provides for useful support for voluntary organization.



Initiated by employer rather than employees. Often becomes popular and can result in too many people ap-

plying. Difficult to resolve if it doesn't work out, given the time period.

- **Volunteer award schemes.** Usually annual celebrations of employee achievements where awards are given to nominated individuals or teams, or to the organizations in which they have been active.



Highly motivating, and an excellent way of demonstrating commitment. Can be an effective way of finding out what employees are doing without appearing intrusive, and also helps to build a long-term program.



Publicity needs to be carefully managed so employees don't feel we are using their private efforts to gain free PR. Selection needs to be open and participative to avoid suspicions

and favoritism. These activities can be successfully supported with—

- **Matched giving and financial support.** The employer makes a contribution to match funds donated or raised by employees; or the employer makes a financial contribution to charities in which employees are involved.



Visible and welcome resource for voluntary organizations; popular with employees.



If not capped, can exceed budgets. Can appear a remote and easy option if this is the only form of activity.

- **Contributions in kind.** Generally results from requests from employees on behalf of organizations in which they are active. Ranges from donating new or used equipment,

furniture or stationery to occasional use of facilities such as meeting rooms.



Can be a welcome resource, especially targeted at a specific need.



Can risk being dumping ground for equipment that is of no more use to the community organization than to the company.

### **If we would like to involve employee volunteers in our organization**

If we want to obtain support from private or public employers in our area, we can help identify which ones to approach by asking the following questions:

- Which organizations have a history of involvement in the community? More specifically, do any already have links with our organization?
- Which organization would be interested in what we could offer?

- Which organizations have the skills we are looking for?
- Do we have a personal contact in any of these organizations?
- Which organizations have undergone a recent restructuring or recently moved into the area that might make them keen to build links with the community?

Many organizations find it easiest to use the services of a broker (see box).

### **Brokerage**

Brokers are the intermediaries who enable employee involvement in the community by matching the needs of all parties. They are useful for three main reasons:

- Companies, public and community organizations all lack the time to research potential partner.
- Brokers know the needs of all the sectors and are experienced in translating these into negotiated outcomes.
- Brokers understand local community issues and can match suitable partners to bring about positive change.

# some essential contacts

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## Bridging the Gap

Bridging The Gap works to make the Kansas City region sustainable by connecting environment, economy and community.

Bridging The Gap seeks to educate citizens, businesses and government on the impact of decisions and behavior on our present and future community and world. The cornerstone for our success in raising awareness and changing behaviors is finding common ground we all share.

**Tel:** 816-561-1087

**Website:** [www.bridgingthegap.org](http://www.bridgingthegap.org)

## National Public Lands Day

National Public Lands Day began in 1994 with three federal agencies and 700 volunteers. Last year 120,000 volunteers worked in over 1,800 locations and in every state. Now, 8 federal agencies and many state and local lands participate in this annual day of caring for shared lands.

National Public Lands Day keeps the promise of the Civilian Conservation Corps, the "tree army" that worked from 1933-42 to preserve and protect America's natural heritage.

**Tel:** 202-833-2933

**Website:** [www.nationalpubliclandsday.org](http://www.nationalpubliclandsday.org)

## Hands on Kansas City

Hands On Kansas City is a non-profit organization that makes meaningful volunteer opportunities more accessible to active people with busy schedules. Our members primarily are working professionals between the ages of 25 and 45. However, our flexible approach to volunteering has a very broad appeal. As a result, membership ranges from students to retired persons. We also provide family volunteer opportunities so members can volunteer with their children. Working in teams headed by project coordinators, we provide reliable and enthusiastic volunteers who help at events for community service organizations throughout the Kansas City metropolitan area.

**Tel:** 913-341-1792

**Website:** [www.handsonkc.org](http://www.handsonkc.org)

## The United Way

United Way is working to advance the common good by creating opportunities for every person to reach their full potential. In greater Kansas City, we are focusing on:

- Successful Youth, Children and Families
- Financial Stability
- Healthy People; Healthy Communities

**Tel:** 816-472-4289

**Website:** [www.unitedwaykc.org/](http://www.unitedwaykc.org/)

## Volunteer KC

The Volunteer Centers in greater Kansas City have a long and admirable history of service to the community. Together they are an even more valuable resource to greater Kansas City as they:

1. Connect volunteers with opportunities to serve;
2. Build the capacity for effective local volunteering;
3. Promote volunteering; and
4. Develop strategic initiatives to mobilize volunteers to meet local community needs

**Tel:** 816-559-4667

**Website:** [www.volunteerkc.org/](http://www.volunteerkc.org/)

## Habitat for Humanity

Habitat for Humanity works in partnership with God and people everywhere, from all walks of life, to develop communities with people in need by building and renovating houses so that there are decent houses in decent communities in which every person can experience God's love and can live and grow into all that God intends.

**Tel:** 816-924-1096

**Website:** [www.habitatkc.org](http://www.habitatkc.org)