Corporate Volunteering Whitepaper

THE INCREASING INTEREST IN CORPORATE VOLUNTEERING

One of the unexpected consequences of COVID-19 is the increased interest in corporate volunteering.

A well planned and executed Corporate Volunteering Program can deliver benefits to all those involved:

**Companies benefit** from increased staff engagement through meaningful volunteering, which is even more important in the current times.

**For purpose organisations benefit** from additional resources to deliver their mission

**The sector benefits** from higher profile and broader support bases being woven through our communities

The nature of corporate volunteering has also changed from using company volunteers for labour intense but unskilled work to more tailored programs that use the volunteer’s professional skills whilst also promoting the organisation’s mission. Company volunteers stuffing envelopes, gardening or painting NFP offices is giving way to providing mentoring support, assisting customers improve their CVs and interview skills, or using their IT expertise to help implement a CRM system.

These new generation corporate volunteering programs require more careful crafting of a mutually beneficial value proposition.

With this in mind, The Centre For Social Purpose organised a Forum involving 60 sector leaders to:

**Gain insights** from Richard Duncan and Claire Turner from Team Building with Purpose: Mobilize Online about how they implemented corporate volunteering initiatives at Wesley Mission and other For Purpose organisations

**Take away practical ideas** from peers in small group discussion.

WHY IS CORPORATE VOLUNTEERING BENEFICIAL?

"Ideally, a good Corporate Volunteer program engages the corporate sector with the issues one works on and the people one supports, brings money and expertise into one’s organisation, and builds relationships to open doors for further opportunities of engagement."

Matt Pritchard (Volunteer Engagement Manager, Asylum Seeker Resource Centre)

**Increases Engagement with our Mission**

Corporate volunteering initiatives enable you to introduce people to the complex issues your organisation is tackling in a meaningful and engaging way. These programs - often teambuilding events - engage company staff more than if they were simply to provide a donation. When companies have direct involvement with your staff and customers, it deepens their understanding of your cause.

"It's a great way for corporates to fall in love with your cause and understand what you do."

Richard Duncan (CEO, Team Building With Purpose : Mobilize Online)

**Access to specialist expertise**

A well-designed program can provide your organisation with pro-bono skill sets that might otherwise be hard to access.

**Entry Point For Long Term Relationships**

Corporate volunteering is a mutually beneficial way to build a long-term relationship. It enables successful ventures to be followed up by more complex partnering as trust and satisfaction develops.

It can also be the catalyst for financial donations and gaining an internal champion. Additional corporate partners may be attracted to you when your current partners promote the value of engaging with you.

ROUNDTABLE PARTICIPATING ORGANISATIONS

Do some preparation
Lifting your offerings from working bees to tailored staff engagement programs can challenge your creativity. Take some time to do some market research and a deep dive into possible value propositions for your organisation and potential partners.

Focus on their company
The speakers highlighted this require a critical mindset change. When meeting companies, the temptation is to talk about your cause and your organisation. However, a more effective approach is to focus on what their company is seeking to achieve.

Are they looking for meaningful teambuilding activities to build morale and staff engagement when COVID-19 is increasing social isolation? Are they looking for ways to build their brand?

Corporates will be more receptive to a volunteering initiative when it can be connected to a current business priority. Take the time to hear their interests and be creative in response.

“Corporates will bring you into their organisation as you are meeting their need to engage staff and help build morale”

Richard Duncan (CEO, Team Building With Purpose : Mobilize Online)

Select the Right Company to Approach
While we are passionate about our cause, the reality is companies are constantly bombarded by approaches from charities and appeals for donations. Conversely corporates tend to reach out to charities that offer valuable corporate volunteering activities as they need them. This is about leveraging this need and meeting it first.

The presenters and experienced participants emphasised that approaching potential corporate partners requires research and preparation. “Cold” calls or an email campaign will not be as effective.

It’s important to conduct research to identify potential alignments with your cause.

Do they have a Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) target or plan? Does their website or annual report show support for specific causes? Is there an alignment of values? Does the company have an existing connection to a cause through an executive connection or the nature of their business?

Be Clear on the “Why”
Be very clear on the purpose of the program for both you and the corporate, and define what success looks like.

“The key learning was to ensure there is a win-win, to really think through what is the value to the organisation.”

Tara Cheesman (Head of Partnerships, Grants and Fundraising, St John Ambulance NSW)

Create a Business Case
At some stage, you will be asking your organisation to provide resources and funding to promote and manage these corporate volunteering initiatives.

While you can see the benefits of corporate volunteering, the reality is you are competing for resources that your organisation can apply elsewhere. For example, executive teams need to decide whether to use funding for corporate volunteering initiatives or service delivery.

Your business case needs a:

- **Strategic rationale**: how does this support our purpose and commercial and brand objectives? how is this aligned with other organisational strategies?
- **Resource plan**: what resources do we need, what expertise?
- **Financial rationale**: financial benefits, including short and long-term Return on Investment, and opportunity cost of staff time and energy

Identify online volunteering opportunities
Finding volunteering initiatives is harder in the COVID-19 world. Previous in-person corporate volunteering initiatives may no longer be an option.

Participants highlighted the need to find online initiatives.

Find a value proposition that is exciting and delivers on the need for both you and them.

Examples included providing mentoring or support through online or phone. One corporate helped a For Purpose organisation’s clients improve their resume, gain interviewing skills, work placements and find jobs.
EFFECTIVE STRATEGIES TO PROMOTE AND MANAGE CORPORATE VOLUNTEERING

Resource it Properly

Companies are viewing your corporate volunteering opportunity through the lens of a teambuilding or engagement and morale improvement initiative.

You are therefore competing with other similar For Purpose volunteering projects, as well as teambuilding initiatives from For Profit organisations.

You will need to present your organisation and this project in a professional way and be able to manage the complexities of this project.

“You may be managing groups of anywhere from 20 to 100 corporate volunteers at a time, so be clear on your ability to deliver this. You need to ask How many internal people do you need to manage this project? What sort of skills do they need? How many corporate partners can you realistically manage? If you can’t resource it internally, consider outsourcing this to a provider who manages this project”

Claire Turner (COO, Team Building With Purpose : Mobilize Online)

Resources required include:

- **Marketing** to identify potential organisations to approach and to provide professional collateral
- **Sales** to build corporate relationships, build a pipeline of potential interest and demonstrate how your corporate volunteering is an effective team building initiative
- **Project management**
- **Group facilitation**

Be realistic about the resources required for success.

**Find a Company Champion or Advocate**

For many, their first contact with a corporate is receiving a phone call from an Admin Assistant with a request to “host” a group of volunteers.

Over time, you will need to build relationships with many stakeholders at different organisational levels, so that this becomes a strategic – not transactional – initiative for the company.

“You can’t just put this on your website and automatically generate enquiries. This requires relationship building and word of mouth”

Richard Duncan (CEO, Team Building With Purpose : Mobilize Online)

A Professional, Disciplined Approach

The presenters highlighted that companies are evaluating our corporate volunteering proposals against other team building initiatives.

It is therefore important to present a professional and disciplined approach in all interactions. For example, getting back quickly to requests for proposals is essential.

You’ll need documented practices and systems to manage the logistics.

Sending feedback surveys following events shows the willingness to improve and build upon the relationship.

**Get the Price Right**

Participants in the roundtable identified finding the right price point as a key challenge in corporate volunteering.

Price-sensitive For Purpose organisations are often tempted to propose a low price for the initiative.

However, a purpose driven teambuilding exercise can deliver significant benefits to a company in terms of staff engagement and brand building.

The presenters suggested conducting a survey to test price points. One option is start with a low price while piloting the project, build a reputation then increase the price to realistically reflect the value.

Corporate volunteering needs to provide sufficient residual revenue to justify the resource investment. You don’t want this to become another loss leading initiative.

**Get Others Involved**

You can’t do this on your own. This is not a fundraising initiative that can be implemented independently.

Your senior leaders will need to connect with corporate senior leaders.

Operation leaders will need to determine how to involve corporate volunteers in your activities and you need to be clear on what they really need. If you deliver against their need this will secure greater organisational buy-in and support.

There may also be some internal resistance to these ideas. Some may see this as a distraction from delivering core services.

Designing an ethical program is important to ensure your staff are engaged and enthusiastic. This makes it all the more important to include your operational colleagues and collaborate with them so they are part of the design.
POSSIBLE PITFALLS

Capability Constraints

Some For Purpose organisations may lack the capabilities & skills required for success – marketing, sales, organising and facilitating large groups of volunteers, event management.

Staff typically join our sector due to their commitment to the cause and service delivery, not to lead corporate volunteering initiatives. It is important to either build internal expertise (recruit or develop) or outsource.

“Be realistic about the time, resources and planning required to deliver a successful program.”
Tara Cheesman (Head of Partnerships, Grants and Fundraising, St John Ambulance NSW)

Finding the volunteer service offering

The Initiative needs to be an attractive teambuilding or development exercise. It needs to be engaging and meaningful to volunteers, while also adding real value to your organisation. COVID-19 also means it is more likely to be online.

The more authentically it delivers against that need the greater the corporate partner buy-in will be.

Companies can be demanding

Some company requests may be difficult to manage. These may be last minute requests such as a significant increase in the number of volunteers or a date change. It is important to manage these professionally.

Ethics, Compliance and Legal Requirements

As your corporate volunteers will often be working directly with your clients or staff, there are ethical, compliance and legal responsibilities involved.

One participant commented:

“It can be a challenge providing volunteers a tangible connection to our services when we are providing confidential services to vulnerable people”

Similarly, there is also a duty of care to corporate volunteers.

Therefore, do a risk assessment and be careful of people’s physical and emotional safety.

Gaining internal support

One participant noted:

“Our biggest challenge is getting other areas of our organisation to help implement this and set it up.”

It is key to gain internal support.

NEXT STEPS

The Forum presented key insights from Subject Matter Experts – Richard Duncan and Claire Turner from Team Building With Purpose, who provide training and consulting services to assist For Purpose organisations implement corporate volunteering initiatives. More information at www.teambuildingwithpurpose.com.au

For more information, attend the Centre’s “Introduction to Corporate Volunteering Workshop” (CSP website link here).

THANK YOU

The Centre would like to thank:

- Our presenters : Richard Duncan and Claire Turner
- The 60 Roundtable participants from the sector who shared their experiences and ideas
- Our Roundtable Facilitator: Michael Curtin
- Our Small Group hosts: Heather Bailey, Graeme Bartram, Neli Bryant, Michael Curtin, Richard Duncan, Craig Hawke, Lyndsay Kennedy & Claire Turner
- Our Whitepaper Writer: Neli Bryant

THE CENTRE FOR SOCIAL PURPOSE

The Centre For Social Purpose (www.tcfsp.com.au) is a membership community to assist For Purpose organisations to achieve their purpose and commercial objectives through improving operational excellence.

Our Board includes the former CEO of The Fred Hollows Foundation (our Chair) and a Director from The Benevolent Society (our Deputy Chair)

Our 60 member organisations include Uniting, St Vincent de Paul, Barnardos, St John Ambulance, Relationships Australia, CareFlight, ChildFund, Sydney Children’s Hospital Foundation and Settlement Services; to name a few.

The Centre’s objective is to assist organisations to achieve their revenue goals, optimise impact and reduce costs through productivity improvements.

We do this by focusing on three areas:

CONNECT: learning from peers through Roundtables and Best Practice Groups

DEVELOP: strengthen capability through cost-effective sector-relevant Workshops, Mentoring and access to Consultants

SAVE: through resource sharing and productivity improvement ideas

To find out more about how the Centre could assist your organisation, contact:
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