

The State of Health of Corporate Volunteering

The Executive Summary Report of the Global Corporate Volunteering Research Project

Global Corporate Volunteering Council

IAVE - International Association for Volunteering Effort

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» **Corporate volunteering is a dynamic, global force, driven by companies that want to make a significant difference to serious global and local problems.**

Every day, all over the world, tens of thousands of corporate employees volunteer their time, talent and energy to make a demonstrable difference in the lives of communities and people in need.

Even the global recession seems to have strengthened corporate volunteering. Global companies report new employee energy for volunteering; more creative initiatives to respond to emerging community problems, particularly basic human needs of people who are unemployed or otherwise vulnerable; more strategic use of volunteering to complement and leverage the giving of money; sustaining pride and morale through difficult times.

In the 30+ years since corporate volunteering was first defined as a discreet set of activities, it has grown from “nice to do” community relations, primarily in the United Kingdom and United States, into a globally-recognized strategic asset that benefits society, the employees who volunteer and the companies that encourage and support their work, one that has become an integral part of corporate social responsibility and sustainability strategies.

Based on interviews with global, regional and national companies, NGOs that promote and support corporate volunteering and independent observers – *this* is the global state of health of corporate volunteering.

* Globalization and Localization

There is a broad diversity of global companies that have sustained volunteer efforts that reach throughout their corporate systems. These include both consumer-focused and business-to-business companies from all industries – banking, insurance, technology, hotels, manufacturing, mining, retail, pharmaceuticals, logistics, consulting, law and more – and operating in every region in the world.

At the same time regional, national and local businesses are mobilizing their employees as volunteers. Working on their own and collaboratively, they are responding to the needs of the communities where they do business.

* Focused Impact

Increasingly, companies are seeking to focus their volunteer efforts on specific priorities, leveraging all of their resource – human, financial, in-kind and relational – to maximize their impact across a broad range of human, social and environmental problems.

Corporate volunteers are addressing basic human needs – hunger, shelter, affordable housing, safety and security; access to and effectiveness of health care.

They are working on issues of social justice – prevention of child labor, women's empowerment, access to legal services, improving opportunities for people with disabilities, overcoming the digital divide.

They are helping children, young people and adults to gain greater literacy and numeracy, to build job skills and to increase their readiness for work, working as mentors, coaches and tutors.

They are planting trees, cleaning shorelines, building playgrounds, educating communities about energy conservation, rehabilitating homes and public buildings.

Corporate volunteers bring to this work their professional and personal skills, their ability to organize and manage projects, their understanding of how to set and meet work goals, their personal passions and commitment.

* Optimistic Dynamism

Corporate volunteering is not static. It is a growing, evolving force, changing to meet new community needs and new company expectations.

Global companies interviewed in the study generally reported ongoing positive change – from planned expansion through their systems and new program initiatives to full-scale re-engineering and re-launching of their programs.

Just as companies are learning to globalize their business, so too are they learning how to globalize their community engagement and volunteering.

As companies are at different points in that process, corporate volunteering is far from mature and is still in active development globally.

Younger workers also have brought new energy and new expectations both to their companies and to their volunteering. In many countries, they come with the experience of having been expected to do community service in high school and at university. While the presence of a strong commitment to corporate social responsibility and an active volunteer effort is not necessarily a reason to join a company, the absence of those can be a deterrent.



» **Corporate volunteering is a “big tent” that encompasses a broad range of activities, philosophies, approaches and management structures.**

Corporate volunteering ranges from companies that encourage individual employees to volunteer on their own to sophisticated interventions by highly skilled volunteers on company time; from neighborhood activities to sending volunteers throughout the world.

It is individual volunteers applying their specialized skills in one-to-one relationships with people in need; small teams working in partnership with NGOs to help them achieve their mission; worldwide mobilizations during days/weeks/months of service that feature one-time projects.

Corporate volunteers raise money and in-kind resources; contribute through micro-volunteering to large scale projects; organize races, “-thons” and community education events. Families often are welcome, as are company retirees, vendors, customers and strategic partners.

Companies depend heavily on global and local NGOs as partners to help them learn about community needs and to focus their volunteers where they can add the greatest value – in return they help to build their partners’ capacity and, together, they invent new initiatives that can transform both partners and the community.

There is no “best way” to do corporate volunteering. Decisions about the nature and scope of a company’s volunteer efforts are highly situational, based on its culture, priorities, resources, the nature of its business and workforce and the on-the-ground realities of the communities in which it does business. Companies are learning that while it is better to do something than to do nothing, it is not necessarily better to try to do everything.

» There are regional and cultural variations in how volunteering is understood and practiced that shape and adapt corporate volunteering to local realities.

The desire and willingness to help is universal. Volunteering, in some form, exists in every society, among people at all economic levels, of all political persuasions, of every religious or ethical belief.

But, even in a globalized world, there are regional and cultural differences in what people value, how they behave, what they consider appropriate and inappropriate. Those differences extend to the practice of volunteering and thus to corporate volunteering.

Companies must understand those differences. How volunteering is done at the headquarters may not be appropriate in other regions of the world. There are sensitivities about graphic images, implications in the use of various colors, differing realities of how people speak, interact and help one another.

In some countries, a strong voluntary sector, working in partnership with and sometimes in opposition to government, is seen as an essential element of their society. In others, there is a strong expectation that government should provide for the public welfare and that there is little room for volunteers in the human services and education.

There is general acceptance in some countries that it is appropriate and desirable for employers to encourage and support employee volunteering. In others, volunteering is seen as personal and private, with no role for employers.

Global companies must navigate these differences in the same way that they have learned to succeed in vastly different business environments, adapting to local values, customs and expectations.



Regional Snapshots

Africa

For the region as a whole, corporate volunteering is very much in its early days. The most notable exception is South Africa where a significant number of country-based companies have organized volunteer programs and have begun collaborative activities. In most countries, companies focus their “corporate social investment” on financial support for NGOs and government-driven initiatives and on sponsorships for community events. Global companies operating in the region report mixed success in effectively involving local workers.



Arab Nations

Corporate volunteering is slowly emerging in the region, primarily in the United Arab Emirates, Jordan, Lebanon and Egypt with limited examples of third-party promotion of and support for the work. In most countries, companies focus their “corporate social investment” on financial support for NGOs and government-driven initiatives and on sponsorships for community events. Global companies operating in the region report mixed success in effectively involving local workers.



Asia-Pacific

Regularly cited by global companies for the enthusiastic volunteering of their employees there, the region also has strong volunteering by its own global and regional companies.. There often is emphasis on visible projects, high participation rates and high levels of activity with emerging concern with impact. Young employees bring great passion and an expectation for company support of volunteering. There is a history of proactive volunteer response to natural disasters and attention to people who are poor and vulnerable.



Europe



Perhaps more than other regions, corporate volunteering is shaped by differences from country to country – in the role of government in social welfare; perceptions of the appropriate role of business in promoting what many consider a private, personal activity; history, religion and tradition. But it is becoming central to companies' CSR posture and as employee engagement tool. Strong models have emerged of collaboration among companies and with NGO partners – e.g., ENGAGE and national corporate volunteer councils in Portugal and Turkey.

Latin America

A distinctive model of corporate volunteering is emerging – focused on transformation rather than “help”, on exercising the right of citizen participation rather than “doing good”. Personal growth of workers is key – expanding their worldview, building understanding of social problems, incorporating the spirit of service in their value system. Trends include workers from different companies acting together; programs led by idealistic young people; volunteers and community together choosing the projects for company support .



North America



In the region of its birth, corporate volunteering is a maturing activity, one present in most major companies and now extending into small and medium size enterprises. Trends include greater alignment with overall CSR and sustainability; attention to skills-based, cross-border programs, and on-site volunteering. There is concern that maturation may lead to loss of innovation. An industry, nonprofit and for-profit, has grown up to support corporate volunteering with technology, evaluation, consulting and program management.

Global companies volunteering globally

Interviews were conducted with 47 global companies. Resulting data contributed to the conclusions in the global State of Health assessment. These additional conclusions grow directly from those interviews.

Strategic Asset

Volunteering is being put to work, in varying degrees, as a strategic asset to help achieve business goals.

Corporate volunteering always has been done for some kind of strategic reason. It has evolved from its original value in community relations to use as a tool in management of corporate culture, employee engagement, brand management, external relations and entry into new markets.

“Volunteering is in our DNA” actually is demonstrably true in some companies, particularly in ones with strong individual founders who were committed to community involvement. Others are using volunteering as a way to shape company culture, adapting it to new realities and to changing expectations of their workers.

Employing a satisfied, loyal and productive workforce is a business imperative. Strategically designed volunteer programs are building strong, effective work teams, offering employees the opportunity for personal development and helping develop leadership and professional skills. Building morale, pride in and loyalty to the company now are desired outcomes of volunteering, not coincidental by-products.

Although in its early stages of development, collaborative volunteering with other companies already is being seen as a way to strengthen relationships with a company’s supply chain, customers and strategic corporate partners, albeit one that requires investment and careful management.

Implications (1) Conscious planning for and demonstrated contribution to business goals strengthens the internal case for volunteering.
(2) Internal partnerships, particularly with those in human resources, are key to success.

Inspiring Practices

“Inspiring practices” are better than “best practices” – “best” is in the eye of the beholder and all practices are highly situational.

The concept of “best practices” is built around the idea that “conventional wisdom” will identify them. But what if people differ on what constitutes a “best practice”? Is something a “best practice” if it is divorced from a clear understanding of the desired outcome?

Some of what generally are called best practices actually are “most popular practices”. Examples of this include “Days/weeks/months of Service” which often seemed to be undertaken because they are “the thing to do” rather than because they are grounded in clear desired outcomes that they are best suited to deliver.

Instead of best practices, the research revealed what we have termed “inspiring practices” – things that companies can learn from one another, that they may adopt and/or adapt to their own situation and put to work to achieve their desired outcomes.

Implications (1) The decision on *what* to do begins with a clear understanding of the desired outcomes and then can be followed by a scan of possibilities and learning from the experiences of others. It is a business decision, not a popularity contest. **(2)** Dissemination of inspiring practices is as important within companies to promote learning and adaptation as it is among companies.



Partnerships with NGOs

Global and local partnerships with NGOs are an essential element of corporate volunteering.

The value of NGOs as partners has grown exponentially as companies have focused both on the impact of their volunteer activities and on volunteering as an integral part of employee engagement.

Companies are now recognizing NGOs as having expertise that can guide corporate involvement, including opportunities for volunteers to put their personal and professional skills to work and existing metrics that can demonstrate impact.

Increasingly, companies and NGOs are moving toward “transformational partnerships” in which they work together intimately and comprehensively to achieve shared objectives through a mutual sharing of people, expertise, learning and resources. As the value of the partnerships grows, companies are willing to invest in capacity building for their partner NGOs.

Many companies are seeking global partners that align with their company-wide focus areas and that can both guide and support their volunteer engagement on a relatively larger scale. At the country and community levels, they seek to partner with NGOs that bring expertise about needs, culture, acceptable roles for volunteers and opportunities for involvement. NGOs also may take on volunteer program management responsibilities that companies want to outsource.

Implications (1) NGOs must understand and be comfortable responding to what companies are seeking in their partnerships. **(2)** Mutual commitment to open communication, joint planning and mutual assessment, learning and feedback strengthen corporate-NGO partnerships.



Different Philosophies and Operations

There are very real differences in the philosophies and operations of corporate volunteering from company to company.

Programs are based variously on business models (“there is value added to the company”); social service models (“helping those in need”); social development models (“changing systems”); and, human development models (“empowering those we help; building engaged, committed citizen volunteers”).

Some are more externally-facing, focused on activities and external impact. Some are more internally-facing, focused on scale of involvement and quality of volunteers’ experience and benefit to the company.

Views differ greatly on the “place” of volunteering in the company, both strategically and operationally, and in the degree of explicit expectation for participation by executives, middle managers and workers. What best fits a company is what is best to do.

Global companies tend to articulate a limited number of global priorities, with the expectation that focus brings greater impact. But there is a recognized reality that local management needs to be able to respond to local expectations and needs. A similar tension is whether what volunteers do is driven by the company or by the employees themselves.

Implications (1) “To your own self be true” is a useful guideline in designing a corporate volunteer program. **(2)** Headquarters can create a global framework of expectations, company priorities and policies but implementation is best driven from throughout the company, responsive to local realities.





Skills-Based and International Volunteering

Skills-based volunteering and international (cross-border) volunteering are significant new trends with great potential impact – but there are major hurdles to bringing them to scale.

Skills-based volunteering (SBV) – the conscious use of professional and personal skills – is as old as corporate volunteering itself. But in recent years it has become increasingly important as a perceived way for companies to increase their impact, both on specific problems and on the capacity of communities and NGOs.

While often thought of as focused primarily on professional skills, SBV actually extends to any relevant skills that can be applied to problem-solving and capacity-building. Skills based volunteers include truck drivers, gardeners and retail clerks as well as IT managers, accountants, lawyers and marketers.

There are two primary challenges to bringing SBV to scale. High impact SBV must have dedicated case management to define needs, shape opportunities, select and prepare volunteers and ensure satisfactory completion of the needed work – all requiring significant company investment. Also, employees may not wish to use their professional skills in their volunteering, preferring instead to participate in activities that either develop new skills or provide them with personal satisfaction and social connection.

International volunteering is in its early days with only a relative handful of companies with significant programs. These tend to fit a company's business interests, their corporate culture and specific skill sets of their employees. There is a clear tie between these programs and companies' leadership and talent development strategies. Because of the high cost of travel, living costs and project management, these opportunities are available to only a small number of employees.

Implications (1) Both SBV and international volunteering have a high return on investment with great potential for impact. **(2)** For many companies, both will be niche programs because they do not allow for mass engagement of employees and require high investment. **(3)** Both provide opportunities for NGOs to assume outsourced program management responsibilities.



Measurement and Evaluation

While there is recognition of the importance of assessing performance, outputs and impact, there is little ongoing investment in sustained and consistent measurement and evaluation.

Despite a clear desire for excellence in their operations, magnitude of volunteer involvement and impact on global and local problems, as a rule companies are not making the investment required to determine that those goals are being met.

Most companies count their outputs – number of volunteers, number of hours served, number of projects, etc. But some deliberately do not count, for practical or philosophical reasons. Many acknowledge weakness in their reporting systems and the lack of firm expectations for reporting, particularly the further from headquarters.

There is a strong perception that the time, expertise and money required for impact evaluation is prohibitive. But there are exceptions. Some companies trust the existing metrics of their partner NGOs to measure their impact. A few have begun to invest in more rigorous, independent models – case studies, pre and post testing, documentation of changes in communities, tracking of attitudes of employee volunteers toward the company and community.

Implications (1) There are no globally accepted standardized models for data collection about corporate volunteering, thus no way to easily aggregate data across companies. **(2)** At the moment, companies tend to rely on anecdotal or common sense assessment of impact, potentially undermining the case for their programs.



Technology

There are emerging examples of innovative use of technology to support both the practice and process of corporate volunteering but most use is rather routine and limited.

While not yet widespread, new uses of technology are finding their way into the “big tent” – through online volunteering that builds sustained mentoring and tutoring relationships; micro-volunteering that enables individual contributions to larger efforts; long-distance skills-based projects.

There are emerging examples of companies developing new online tools to support their employees’ volunteering – primarily through portals, some multi-lingual, that include resource materials and some degree of social media, for employees to exchange experiences and ideas

Accessibility remains a significant problem – both because many line employees have limited or no access to computers in the workplace and because the online tools have been designed to be company-friendly rather than user-friendly. There also are real barriers to using social media within the company as employees are blocked from using social media tools during work time. Many companies indicate frustration with limitations and responsiveness of their software vendors.

Implications (1) Strong partnerships can be built with internal IT resources to provide user-friendly tools for employees and program managers. **(2)** There is an open market for innovative products that meet companies’ needs.



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About the Project

This project was designed to create new knowledge about corporate volunteering that will help businesses expand and strengthen their volunteer efforts, whether globally, nationally or locally.

It is a major contribution of the International Association for Volunteer Effort (IAVE) and its Global Corporate Volunteer Council (GCVC) to the celebration of the 10th anniversary of the United Nations International Year of Volunteers (IYV+10).

The project has two components: the State of Health Study, a regional and global assessment of the nature and scope of corporate volunteering worldwide and the trends, challenges and opportunities that are shaping it, and the Global Companies Study, focused on how global companies organize and manage their volunteer efforts.

These are qualitative studies, based on experiences and observations of companies, NGOs that work to promote and support corporate volunteering and independent observers. The State of Health Study was based on interviews with expert observers; document scan and analysis; interviews with global, regional and national companies; and review of other research studies. The Global Companies Study consisted of in-person and telephone interviews as well as review of company documents and resource materials.

This Report...and Beyond

This report is an executive summary, the top line findings of the project. It is intentionally brief, designed to highlight the major learnings and to disseminate them quickly and efficiently to a broad audience. Additional products will be released throughout 2011 – a full research report, online resources and a book.

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Global Corporate Volunteering Research Project

Global Companies Interviewed

Alcoa

American Airlines

AXA

BD

BHP Billiton

C&A

Camargo Correa

CEMEX

Citi

The Coca-Cola Company

The Walt Disney Company

Dow Chemical Company

Eli Lilly and Company

FedEx

Ford Motor Company

Fujitsu

GE

GSK

HSBC

Hyundai Motor

IBM

KPMG

Kraft Foods Inc.

Linklaters

Manulife Financial

Marriott Hotels Intl

Microsoft

Monsanto

Motorola

National Australia Bank

Nike

Pfizer Inc.

Rolls-Royce

Salesforce.com

Samsung

SAP

SK Telecom

SOMPO Insurance

Standard Chartered Bank

Starbucks

State Street Corporation

Tata Group

Telefonica

UBS

United Business Media LLC

UPS

Vale

Other Companies Interviewed in Latin America as part of the in-depth regional study

Autoridad del Canal de Panamá

Banco Patagonia (Argentina)

Banesco (Venezuela)

Bradesco (Brazil)

British American Tobacco (Mexico)

CCN-Heineken (Mexico)

CEMEX (Mexico)

Credomatic (El Salvador)

FIEMG (Brazil)

Gamesa Quaker (Mexico)

Gruma (Mexico)

Grupo Bimbo (Mexico)

HSBC (Brazil)

Itaú - Unibanco (Brazil)

KPMG (Brazil)

Los Grobo (Argentina)

Manpower (Argentina)

Navistar (Mexico)

P&G (Chile)

Polar (Venezuela)

Prologis (Mexico)

Sigma alimentos (Mexico)

Sofftek (Mexico)

Souza Cruz (Brazil)

Telefônica (Brazil)

Telefónica (Colombia)

Telefónica (Mexico)

Walmart (Mexico)

YPF (Argentina)

Cooperating Organizations

CEMEFI (Mexico)
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ENGAGE (UK)
European Volunteer Centre (Belgium)
EZER (Mexico)
Fundación Compromiso (Argentina)
Fundar (Spain)
GDFE (Argentina)
Glasswings (El Salvador)
IARSE (Argentina)

ICD (Uruguay)
International Business Leaders Forum (UK)
International Volunteering Project at
Brookings (USA)
Özel Sektör Gönüllüler Derneği (Turkey)
Points of Light Institute (USA)
Stakeholders (Peru)
Stratego Consultores (Panama)
United Way Worldwide (USA)
V2V.net / Portal do Voluntario (Brazil)
Volunteer Australia (Australia)
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Volunteering England (UK)