

Reaching the Corporate World Through Effective Corporate Volunteer Council Partnerships

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Are you looking for ways to access corporate resources? Working effectively with your local Corporate Volunteer Council (CVC) can help you reach corporate resources. In some areas of the country, a CVC might be called a Business Volunteer Council (BVC) or some similar name. There are more than 40 CVCs located in major metropolitan areas throughout the United States. If there is no CVC in your area, this article may motivate you to help one get started.

According to Shirley Keller of VOLUNTEER: The National Center, A CVC is formed for three purposes:

1. To exchange information about corporate employee volunteer programs among companies which are operating them and to give those companies in the community which are considering initiating such programs assistance in doing so successfully;
2. To provide a forum for member companies to learn about needs for employee volunteers and resources in the community. This is usually accomplished when a CVC invites a community agency or organization to present information and its needs for volunteers during a regularly scheduled CVC meeting; and
3. To provide a way for member companies to work jointly on a community need or problem which has been identified and is too large or complex for one company to handle alone, and/or to initiate a communi-

ty-wide recruitment or recognition event for corporate volunteers.

In addition to providing information and support to their corporate members about the initiation and maintenance of employee volunteer programs, CVCs also assist community agencies and organizations by offering non-cash resources and employee volunteers for specific needs or programs. However, more than likely, a CVC is not the best organization to access corporate financial support. Often the corporate representative to the CVC may not have responsibility for the company's contributions budget.

If the CVC has a program committee, it is responsible for screening and inviting agencies to make presentations. Suggestions also are initiated by the local Volunteer Center or by individual corporate members. Unless specifically requested by CVC members, monetary needs should *not* be included in the presentation. Generally, only one agency presents per meeting, although that agency can be a representative of a subject area (*i.e.*, health) and present the volunteer needs of a number of related groups in addition to its own.

In order to gain access to corporate resources, it is important to understand how most CVCs work. During a regular CVC meeting, an agency or organization may be invited to make a brief, formal presentation of its needs for employee volunteers and/or non-cash resources and to distribute information to corporate members. This practice increases communica-

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tion between the businesses and non-profits about needs which may affect both of them. It also is an efficient way for the companies to learn about specific needs and for the agency/organization to solicit a number of companies at one time for non-cash/volunteer resources.

To achieve the best response when presenting the needs of a non-profit to a CVC, do a little homework first. Find out the kinds of businesses that will be hearing your presentation and the issues they focus on. For example, at Bell Atlantic the focus is on education as it relates to science/technology literacy. Although Bell Atlantic companies, which include the operating telephone companies in Maryland, Virginia, New Jersey, West Virginia, Pennsylvania, Delaware and the District of Columbia, are involved in helping with a multitude of community needs, there is a particular interest in the education issue. Therefore, as do many other businesses, Bell Atlantic seeks opportunities to help in its focus area.

In 1988-89, almost 20 CVCs across the country worked together on the National Council on Corporate Volunteerism "Helping Hands for the Homeless" CVC project. This focus on the needs of the homeless still continues in many CVCs. CVC presidents recently decided that their next national project will target education, particularly as it relates to job readiness and literacy. Therefore, in the future, these are needs that CVCs may be particularly interested in exploring with nonprofits.

Bring enough of your business cards and printed background information on your nonprofit organization to the CVC meeting for the expected attendance. Your presentation should stay within the time allotted and emphasize volunteer opportunities. Try to paint a verbal picture portraying how volunteers could be helpful. Often a company's focus area will benefit both the company and the community. Benefits to a company may include a positive impact on customers, its future labor pool, employees, etc. Therefore, try to relate the need to benefits for both the community and the CVC companies. Give specific dates and times and approximately the number of volunteers needed for the program. Is public transportation

nearby? Jeanne Phillips of United Telephone of Florida, the CVC Presidents' Representative to the National Council on Corporate Volunteerism, says, "Workplace volunteers often tend to seek opportunities that are short-term, so in your CVC presentation offer one-time opportunities as well as long-term opportunities."

Also find out if any of the businesses in the CVC offer released time or if they are only able to make volunteers available for out-of-hours opportunities.

If you need in-kind services, be specific and convey how the services or goods will be used. Most companies require proof of tax exempt status before contributions can be given. Show how you can recognize the help you receive by bringing copies of your non-profit's newsletter or press releases about a special event.

Typically, CVCs are started by three to five interested businesses in cooperation with a Volunteer Center, United Way or perhaps a Junior League. Membership in a CVC is drawn from corporate representatives who administer employee volunteer programs or from corporate representatives interested in starting such programs. Generally, there is one representative from each CVC member corporation. The average "active" corporate membership ranges from 20 to 30 companies.

Several CVCs have established an "associate member" category to include nonprofit organizations that serve as "clearinghouses" for volunteering in the community and which promote volunteering. Volunteer Centers are the most common associate members; other associate members could include State or Governor's Offices on Volunteerism, Junior League Associations or the United Way. The nature of the associate member category varies, however, and is decided upon by the corporate membership of individual CVCs.

What role does a local Volunteer Center play in a CVC? According to Shirley Keller:

The role of a Volunteer Center in the development and operation of a CVC has proved to be an integral one in almost every currently operating and developing CVC in the country. Volun-

teer Center staff and board members have been among the founders of most CVCs, have participated on the steering committees and assisted with the group's planning, and have provided staff support to assist it in "getting off the ground." Most serve as advisory or associate members once the CVC is fully operational.

In all cases where Volunteer Centers are fully involved in initiating a CVC, they generally limit their roles to a "behind the scenes" facilitator, assisting the corporate members of the CVC to take on leadership positions in the group. This allows the Volunteer Center and the CVC to form a mutually beneficial partnership, while maintaining the CVC as a "corporate-owned and led" organization. In some cases, once the CVC is operating, the Volunteer Center takes on the role of providing administrative support and staffing for the group.

Yosef Hadar, Community Relations Manager of the World Bank, has consulted with CVCs from California to Connecticut. He has observed that CVCs are most effective when the involved businesses are in control and are accountable for the CVC. He also advocates action-oriented projects.

Corporate Volunteer Councils are a vital link between business and the community. If you are interested in determining where the CVC nearest you is located, contact VOLUNTEER: The National Center (telephone 703-276-0542).

REFERENCE

Keller, Shirley. *Developing a Corporate Volunteer Council: Some Guidelines for Success*. Washington, DC: VOLUNTEER: The National Center. 1986.