

VOLUNTEERISM IS GOOD BUSINESS

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Ideashop Focus: Cooperative Voluntary and Volunteer Efforts Between Corporate and Private Sectors

Discussion

Volunteer programs or efforts currently supported by business.

Four ways businesses actively support volunteer activities are: (1) corporate contribution programs (2) lending their executives, middle and upper management, to community volunteer programs (3) supporting employees who want to pursue volunteer work on company time. (Often these employees also have access to company resources.) (4) encouraging employees to participate in volunteer community activities on the employees' own time.

Benefits of business encouragement of volunteerism.

By volunteering, employees learn new skills which they can share with other employees in their company or agencies. Volunteerism creates a ripple effect by encouraging others to volunteerism. This, in turn, lowers the cost of services to the community. A growing, energetic and involved community should result from these efforts. Companies can contribute to a more vital community by providing employees leave to perform social services. In return, businesses and the quality of life will improve.

Current practices by business vis-a-vis volunteer experience.

Skills learned on volunteer jobs are often transferrable if they relate directly to the paid position sought. Many companies, however, do not formally acknowledge volunteer experience on application forms or personnel records because of red-tape involved in changing existing personnel policies. another problem area noted is that volunteer programs have, in the past, been directed at management level employees. Blue collar employees also could use volunteer experience to upgrade their skills and enhance their upward mobility.

Securing volunteers materials or money from business for community service projects.

Volunteer agencies who want assistance from business must be incorporated, have an IRS exemption and a board of directors and must have specific community goals and plans. Businesses suggest that volunteer groups address a letter to the president describing their project with a statement detailing advantages and benefits of the program to the company and

its employees. Include job descriptions for short term jobs and explain the skills needed. A good idea is to learn the resources of the company and its employees' skills and tailor the request for volunteers accordingly. Volunteer agencies should thank businesses for their cooperation and assistance.

Problems of the corporate sector and the voluntary sector.

Volunteer groups requesting volunteers, materials and money from businesses should approach businesses whose goals are consistent with those of the community volunteer group. Businesses are responsible to (1) their stockholders (2) their employees and (3) the community in which they do business. Problems arise when companies are inundated with requests that are not consistent with company goals.

Two other problem areas in the voluntary sector were discussed: (1) volunteer taking the place of paid employee and (2) volunteers working during strikes. Business and volunteer agencies must be aware of these potential problems and pitfalls in volunteerism.

Indicator Statements

- . Industry often does not recognize volunteer work credentials.
- . Companies find they must "cut through much red tape" in changing personnel policies to encourage or credit volunteer experience.
- . Some businesses do not document volunteer experience.
- . Blue collar workers often are not encouraged to work as volunteers or to gain experience and skills that would upgrade their employment opportunities.
- . Volunteer agencies often do not consider businesses' needs or goals when soliciting materials, supplies, and/or volunteers.
- . Volunteer agencies sometimes inundate companies with requests instead of carefully choosing companies to approach.
- . Unions resent volunteer's working during strikes or taking the place of paid employees.
- . Business often cannot afford to give employees time off to volunteer.

Back Home Application Ideas

For Companies

- * Documentation of volunteer work and its value on individual personnel records of company.
- * Reimbursement of company employees for time working on community projects.
- * Funding of volunteer community projects (performed on employees' own time) by companies.
- * Institution of flex-time to allow employees to volunteer on lunch hour, before or after work.
- * Hiring a company counselor to assist employees in documentation of volunteer experience.
- * Adaptation of volunteer program ideas.

For Volunteer Groups

- * Documentation of volunteer work, job description, amount of training received and performance evaluation for volunteer's own records.
- * Researching companies that have foundation, or will fund projects, donate materials and/or employees to volunteer projects.
- * Contacting public relations or corporate affairs office of company to get donations of volunteers, money or materials. In federal government contact top executive in appropriate bureau.
- * When asking companies, unions, etc. for funds make sure you use their products.
- * Request use of company newsletter, when possible, to disseminate needs of volunteer organization. Be aware, however, that many businesses will not do this due to space, legal and financial considerations.
- * Thanking businesses and government for volunteer contributions.
- * Developing volunteer programs jointly with businesses.