

**Association
Community
Service** 

By Susan J. Ellis

Much attention has been paid in recent years to the concept of "corporate social responsibility." With the President setting the national tone, businesses have been challenged to respond to growing social needs in their local communities. There is a belief that for-profit companies have skills and resources that can provide solutions to many community problems. Through such civic involvement, businesses ultimately create a stronger economic base that will prove critical to continued sales and lower taxes.

Why should your trade or professional association, or individual company, consider a community service project? Beyond the just mentioned interconnection of business and community health, sponsorship of employee volunteer activities and other corporate philanthropy has several tangible benefits:

... An Exchange Of Benefits



Susan J. Ellis

- It provides visibility and positive public relations.
- It gives employees the chance to apply their talents in new ways, providing them a fresh perspective on their company work.

**Decision-making list
in July Briefs**

- It uncovers new information about your customer base.
 - It increases employee morale and sense of teamwork.
- Of course, such benefits only result when a community service project is

well chosen, well planned, and well executed.

Becoming involved in the community requires the same attention and resources as does any other aspect of conducting business: (1) Articulate a rationale for why your association or company wants to provide such service; (2) Set measurable goals for evaluating success; (3) Develop a budget; (4) Assign staff to manage the project, and (5) Generate enthusiasm at all levels of your organization.

How do you get started? There are several decisions you will need to make to lay the ground work for your community service effort. There are no "right" or "wrong" paths to take except that you must make choices based on the **interests** and **capabilities** of your own organization. Since there are literally hundreds of worthwhile causes you could support, it follows that there are many different

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PaSAE Members Are Volunteers

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care products have helped area shelters. Contact Patricia A. Adams, CAE, RCE, (717) 663-0200.

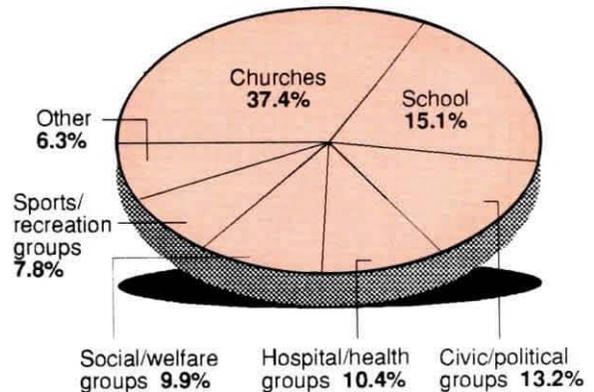
PA OPTOMETRIC ASSN: Signs up members to provide eye care and glasses to low income workers and their families to help promote quality eye care through a project called Vision USA: The PA Project. Contact Brian Dorsey, 717-233-6455.

NORTH PENN BOARD OF REALTORS, INC.: Helped fix up low rental properties owned by a community housing non-profit group as part of a self-sufficient program for single women with children. Contact Jane G. Forth, 215-362-2336.

PA ASSN OF COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES: Sponsors PA Campus Contact, an action-oriented coalition of college and university presidents and CEOs who foster greater civic responsibility among college students by providing community service opportunities for them. This project received an ASAE Associations Advance America Award in 1991. Contact Diana Bucco, 717-232-4446.

PA ASSN OF REALTORS: REALTORS for Literacy in PA is administered through local real estate

boards with the association providing administrative and artistic support. Local boards prepare community service scrapbooks which vie for statewide prizes. Contact Ty L. Smith, 717-561-1303.



According to the 1991 census, the following *USA Today* graph indicates where Americans volunteer their time.

Decision-Making Is Crucial For Volunteers

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ways you can approach your service project and still be of help.

Degree of company involvement.

How directly involved will your association or company become in this project? Will you provide information only, allowing community agencies to recruit your members/employees as volunteers through your in-house communication vehicles, but such volunteering will take place solely during each person's own free time? Or do you expect to offer "release time" so that members/employees offer service during the regular work day? An intermediate option is to have the volunteering occur on personal time, but to support the effort tangibly with tools, transportation, refreshments, and other organizational resources.

Selection of projects. What criteria will you use to select causes and agencies to receive your official help? Will you be reactive (responding only if first approached) or proactive (finding ways to act on your special concerns)? Will employee/member volunteering

be connected to other forms of philanthropy? For example, if you give money to certain agencies, will you encourage your staff to also volunteer at those sites? Who will select the projects? Top management? A committee? Will you connect your choices to volunteering already being done by your members/employees?

Will you seek out ways to apply the professional skills of your employees/members? Or do you wish to diversify by selecting projects that offer a change of pace and image?

Type of volunteering. Which of the wide range of community service options are you most interested in supporting? Individual, ongoing volunteering? Group volunteering? One-time events? Short-term projects with specific goals (such as building a playground)? Intensive attention to one issue (such as adopt-a-school)?

Who will volunteer. Finally, consider the scope of your efforts. Are you going to focus on active members/employees only? Or will you also recruit retirees? Family members? Is

community service for everyone, at every level—from executives to custodial staff?

While the questions above may raise complexities you may not have considered, it should be clear that your effectiveness in serving the community starts with proper planning. The best "service" is really an **exchange**—when the provider of help also benefits in return. Start by knowing what you want to accomplish for your association or company and then put your energies into applying those criteria to solving a real community need. Everyone wins!

(Ellis is President of ENERGIIZE, Inc., a Philadelphia-based training, consulting and publishing firm specializing in volunteerism. She is on the staff of the Corporate Volunteer Council of the Delaware Council and has authored or co-authored seven books and over 60 articles on all aspects of volunteerism. A FREE copy of the resource catalog published ENERGIIZE, Inc., is available by calling 1-800-395-9800.)