
Using VCs to Tap the Workplace for **VOLUNTEER** Resources



As local nonprofits search for new ways to help meet community needs, many are looking to the workplace for help in providing volunteers and non-cash resources. However, they often find developing effective working relationships with corporations and businesses is time consuming and more work than they're ready for. What's needed is a source that can provide assistance to the nonprofit, which needs help, as well as to the company, which may be able to provide it.

Your local Volunteer Center is that source. Many can match nonprofits in search of volunteers and resources with companies who can provide them. The result is mutually beneficial programs designed to meet community needs and to involve "new" types of volunteers. Whether it is identifying qualified company personnel to sit on a nonprofit's board of directors or locating enough willing hands to refurbish a playground on a designated weekend, an increasing number of Volunteer Centers across the country are filling the vital role of volunteer/resource broker between the workplace and local volunteer programs.

Volunteer Centers work with large corporations as well as medium-size companies and small businesses to help them encourage their employees to volunteer and support them in their involvement.

Most Volunteer Centers begin to work with businesses that already have been involved with community projects. Whether the business has donated tee-shirts for a local marathon or encouraged employees to donate blood, the Volunteer Center uses those and similar efforts as a base to encourage it to expand employee volunteering and, at times, to launch a formalized employee volunteer program.

While some volunteer groups may al-

ready be working with individual businesses to get volunteers and other resources, Volunteer Centers can offer specific services both to the business and the nonprofit to supplement those arrangements or to widen the nonprofit's contacts with other businesses.

For example, some Centers handle volunteer recruitment campaigns for the businesses and coordinate referrals for the nonprofits. Others work with the nonprofits to develop projects specifically geared toward attracting and involving employee volunteers and then "sell" the business on encouraging and supporting involvement in such projects by their employees.

What Business Has to Offer

● **Concentrated Pools of Potential Volunteers to Work on Specific Projects.** One of the attractions of working with businesses to get volunteer help is the access to relatively concentrated numbers of potential or already involved volunteers among the company's employee population. However, as Joe O'Dell, corporate liaison coordinator for the Hartford, Connecticut Volunteer Action Center, points out, "Most companies that even have some type of volunteer activity do not have the time to develop their own project that fits the community. The Volunteer Center can go in and not only help create a specific volunteer corporate policy, but also market the concept to top brass.

"Corporations want to have a certain corporate-volunteer image. They want to know what others in the community are doing. And most of the time, they want a project that is unique to them and to be able to do it better than others."

● **A Source for Management Assistance.** "Everyone in a company has some specific skill that they use day in and day

out and many times do not realize it is something that nonprofit groups are seeking," says Bernie Katz, corporate volunteer liaison of the Volunteer Center of South Orange County, California. "It's simply a matter of informing the employees through the company that their services and skills are needed."

Some Volunteer Centers recruit these skilled employee volunteers—who could be lawyers, accountants, secretaries as well as company presidents, loading dock foremen and mid-managers—on an informal basis, while other Centers have formalized skillsbanks or Management Assistance Programs to meet the need.

● **A Source for Volunteer Board Members.** Specific programs to recruit directly from the corporate executive ranks to fill board positions are also in place at some Volunteer Centers. In some instances, the Centers recruit candidates, interview and match them with a nonprofit agency, performing the entire task quickly and professionally.

● **Retirees as Volunteers.** Some Volunteer Centers emphasize retired professionals as an additional source of volunteers. They encourage companies to look not only at their retiring employees' insurance and financial picture but also at their leisure time, which can be valuable to volunteer programs.

"What has been super is the fact that retired corporate women have been calling and offering their services, where in the past they simply quit and cleaned the house," says Debbie Walsh, Hartford, Conn. Voluntary Action Center director.

Retirees also have been recruited to fill agency board of director positions, since

Danny Macey, freelance writer in the Washington, D.C. area, researched and wrote the articles in this section.

many times they have both a flexible schedule to make meetings and the expertise to contribute significantly to an agency's activities.

• **An Organized Way for Communicating Community Needs.** In some 30 communities, companies and businesses, in cooperation with the local Volunteer Center, have formed Corporate Volunteer Councils (CVCs). CVCs are loose coalitions of companies that either have formalized employee volunteer programs or participate in a variety of community volunteer activities without a formalized program inside their company.

Through a CVC, member companies exchange information about implementing employee volunteer programs and learn about community needs for volunteers and non-cash resources from the local Volunteer Center. Although the CVC is led by corporate volunteer administrators, the Volunteer Center serves as the CVC's coordinator.

The Mutual Benefits

Corporations involved in local volunteer projects offer their employees the opportunity to build new skills, establish new relationships and feel more responsible for their paid jobs. In addition, research shows they benefit from lower absenteeism rates and increased productivity among employees who volunteer.

And the benefits to a participating volunteer program are equally numerous. A nonprofit agency receives additional skilled volunteers while gaining an entire new service population and source of technical and training personnel. It also will learn more about the world of corporations, how to approach them successfully and become more familiar with the needs of the employees.

Increased community visibility and publicity for both parties in the service partnership are also guaranteed through most Volunteer Center-assisted corporate programs.

Keeping in mind the findings of a 1985 VOLUNTEER survey, in which 67 percent of the Volunteer Centers polled responded that they "regularly work with corporations and local businesses to encourage the involvement of their employees in community volunteer activities," volunteer programs should first seek out their local Volunteer Center for assistance in tapping corporations for human resources.

The following examples show some of the innovative ways Volunteer Centers have involved companies and businesses.

INTRODUCING MINORITY STUDENTS TO THE WORK WORLD IN NEW YORK CITY

In New York City, high school teachers and counselors are learning to teach minority students exactly what to expect once out of the academic environment and into the "real world" through workshops offered by local companies and businesses.

The Mayor's Voluntary Action Center coordinates this federally funded program to orient minority students to the attitude, manner, dress and policies businesses expect of their employees. While no company is offering the students a job, the on-site exposure to entry-level positions lets teachers better understand the business climate.

Called "Corporate Volunteer Involvement in Improving Job Marketability of Minority Youth," the program consists of a one-day workshop to orient 80 teachers, counselors and administrators from 10 schools to 30 different businesses. On the second day, it's the students' turn. Both minority and disabled youths get the opportunity to meet with representatives of the companies.

The \$79,000 awarded the project by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services also will provide for substitute teachers to enable teachers to participate in the program during school hours.

The project's emphasis is on showing students that the entry-level positions are not going to be dead-end jobs and that through job performance, it is possible to work up the ranks, according to Kim Miller, project director.

The program will be offered in most of the participating schools through an "Introduction to Occupations" class within the career awareness departments.

RECRUITING EXECUTIVES TO SERVE ON CHICAGO'S NONPROFIT BOARDS

In Chicago, the Voluntary Action Center of United Way/Crusade of Mercy pairs company executives with local agencies to fill board positions.

This Board Leadership Resource Program began in 1982 in response to agency needs for new leadership skills in the midst of federal budget cuts, according to Robert Adams, VAC director and project manager. During the project's first year, the Chicago VAC placed 160 executives on 75 city and suburban social service boards of directors.

The volunteers are corporate personnel with expertise in such areas as public relations, marketing, long-range planning and fund raising. The board leadership program gives them the opportunity to apply their leadership, stewardship and trustee skills in nonprofit agency programs, Adams explains.

The program operates through a governing committee of volunteers from community service groups and business and agency executives working with VAC staff. Two committee task forces are responsible for recruiting corporations and nonprofits for the program.

Each participating corporation is asked to appoint an official liaison person to work with the VAC on recruitment and placement of volunteers from the company. The liaison then publicizes the program within the company and provides the VAC interviewing staff with names of senior and mid-level management executives who are interested in serving on agency boards. Interviews, according to Adams, take place most often at the corporation's offices.

"It fills a certain personal need for involvement," notes one executive volunteer. "It fills some undefinable desire for both career diversification on the one hand, and perhaps the ability to provide some level of experience that your career might not allow you to do."

The task force responsible for recruiting

As I See It

Julie Washburn, Executive Director, Volunteer Service Bureau, Orlando, Fla. and Chair, Volunteer Center Advisory Council



A Volunteer Center plays a vital role in the community by serving as a centralized clearinghouse for volunteer recruitment, training and promotion. It synergizes community resources, maximizing the contribution of volunteer skills, time and money to respond to community needs and problems. In the future, Volunteer Centers must recognize and utilize their power to empower and enable the citizens to respond creatively and effectively in molding their community and providing the best quality of life.

the nonprofit groups holds orientation sessions with interested agencies. Task force members offer them assistance in analyzing their boards and then require them to submit formal applications for participating based on the analysis. A profile of agency needs and requirements is prepared, and the task force reviews it and approves participation after it is apparent that the agency can utilize skilled business executives, Adams said.

The actual placement process is similar to the "executive search" approach utilized in the business world where the pairing takes place on the basis of an intensive interview with the volunteer, followed by meetings and visits with the agency nominating committees.

Adams notes one recent success.

"At an Esmark Foundation award presentation, one of our local nonprofit agencies was cited for improved management and board leadership," he said. "The agency credited our board leadership program as the key to its turnaround. Four of its board members were recruited through the program."

An intricate part of the program, Adams adds, is its emphasis on the recognition of the contributions of individual volunteers, their corporate sponsors and the agencies that have utilized these skilled volunteers.

HOUSTON COMPANIES CHOOSE FROM FIVE SERVICE PACKAGES

No matter the size of a business, its scope of desired involvement or any time constraints, The Volunteer Center of the Texas Gulf Coast in Houston has the exact project to fit each company's structure and needs.

Treating its entire corporate project as a business, the Volunteer Center offers five different types of "service packages" to a company—or "client"—who wants to participate in the program. In turn, the Center's nonprofit constituents are matched according to the type of involvement each company desires.

"One type of package we offer consists of a single special event," explains Volunteer Center Director Carrie Moseley. "The corporate client gives us the number of employees who will be involved, the amount of money it wants to spend and the type of project it desires. We develop the project and match it with a community agency."

Besides working with large corporations, the Houston Volunteer Center does

WORKPLACE IN THE COMMUNITY

Workplace in the Community (WIC)—a partnership involving VOLUNTEER, Levi Strauss Foundation, CBS Inc., Honeywell Inc. and the Aetna Life and Casualty Foundation to improve the quality and increase the quantity of workplace-based volunteering—has targeted six Volunteer Centers to focus on initiating or improving business and volunteer interaction in their respective communities.

VOLUNTEER staff who administer the project provide Volunteer Center staff with technical assistance in expanding communication networks among corporations as well as increasing the effectiveness of local corporate volunteer councils.

The six Volunteer Centers are Volunteer DeKalb, Atlanta; Voluntary Action Center of United Way/Crusade of Mercy, Chicago; Volunteer Action Council, Philadelphia; Volunteer Center of South Orange County, Santa Ana, Calif.; Volunteer Center of Santa Clara County, San Jose; and the Voluntary Action Center of Southwestern Fairfield County, Stamford, Conn.

considerable work with small businesses and medium-size companies.

"These types of businesses many times feel lost in a big event and feel their contribution is left out, but they still want to do something meaningful for their community," Moseley says.

One example is where a small area bank with no more than 20 employees took those involved in a women's crisis center out for a picnic.

"It was a nice, one-day project where everyone involved enjoyed themselves," Moseley said. "They may not do it again, but it was a project where the bank felt recognized and like it was doing its own small part for the community."

Other packages include special events that can be run more than once a year and a "community box" in which evening and weekend volunteer jobs in neighborhoods are listed and updated each week. The projects are innovative and try to shy away from the average walk-a-thon or bake sale, Moseley said. And since most companies are computer oriented, the Center hopes soon to have the community box on some type of computer disc or accessible to the corporation via phone hook-up.

"Our service package program is a link to resources both parties always wanted but did not know where to go," she said.

HARTFORD, CONN. VAC SHOWS BENEFITS OF CLOSE WORKING RELATIONSHIP

One Hartford, Conn. company is so committed to volunteering that it arranged with the local Voluntary Action Center to have a full-time VAC staff person work in its corporate headquarters.

For the past year, Evelyn Herrman-Keepling of the Voluntary Action Center for the Capitol Region has worked with the employees of CIGNA in their own workplace to initiate a volunteer recruitment campaign and organized recognition activities. In addition, she is working with CIGNA on a retiree volunteer program and released-time policy. In return for her assistance, CIGNA contributed \$34,000 to the Volunteer Center.

"While it may seem like an ideal situation," she says, "it is sometimes a difficult position to be employed by the VAC while working at CIGNA. Agencies and volunteers must be sensitive to a company's culture and its policies and attitudes toward volunteering."

To cultivate such awareness, the VAC publishes a listing of Hartford area companies and their policies toward employee volunteering and non-cash contributions. The directory lists the corporation's contributions policy and in-kind services offered to agencies as well as a contact person within the company.

"It is a very useful tool for nonprofits who want specific help but do not know who to go to," says Joe O'Dell, VAC corporate liaison coordinator.

OBTAINING DONATED EQUIPMENT AND SUPPLIES

A van, 170,000 pencils, several copying machines and a pile of running shorts have all been donated to the Southwestern Fairfield County, Connecticut Voluntary Action Center in the past year through its Corporate Resource Program.

Businesses, corporations and some individuals in Stamford donated almost \$100,000 worth of goods last year, according to VAC Director Marilyn Murphy, who explained that the donations are solicited to meet community agency resource needs.

"Nonprofit agencies give us a wish list of materials they need," she said. "When companies and businesses call us, we tell them about the requests."

Agencies then arrange to pick up the items. While many of the donated goods are from large companies changing to more advanced equipment, many doctors' offices and small businesses have donated a good share of their surplus goods.

The VAC also operates a Volunteer Management Assistance Program that channels the expertise of business employees and individuals into social service and civic agencies. The volunteer can either choose to operate on a short-term consultant basis or serve on agency boards.

The VAC acts as a liaison, placing the volunteers, seeing that a consulting project solves an agency's problems practically, and evaluating the project six months after its conclusion.

Examples of technical assistance projects involving corporate employees include improving an agency's billing system, upgrading food services for a halfway house, developing a comprehensive filing system for a health agency, and designing workshops to address common agency problems.

INVOLVING EMPLOYEES IN GROUP PROJECTS IN SANTA ANA, CALIFORNIA

In Santa Ana, California, corporate employees may have no time to "monkey around" but this spring more than 250 volunteers from 13 companies will do just that.

Recruited and coordinated by the Volunteer Centers of Orange County, California, the corporate volunteers will spend one day this March improving the grounds and facilities of the Santa Ana Zoo for the Friends of the Santa Ana Zoo.

Twelve different projects, including renovating the monkey exhibit, replacing chain-link fence along the wallaby and alpaca yards, constructing a gazebo for animal rides and sandblasting and painting a facility building, will be completed on the first Saturday in March.

This one-day event will be the second corporate-volunteer effort involving more than 200 employees. Last year, such a group renovated and maintained the Explorative Learning Center, an authentic turn-of-the-century village.

While the zoo project has no operating

budget, businesses and participating companies have donated about \$20,000 worth of supplies. The estimate of donated people power "is too staggering to put a price on," said Bernie Katz, South Orange County Volunteer Center project coordinator.

The county Volunteer Centers act as clearinghouses not only for recruiting volunteers but also for organizing each company to research a group project, determining the exact number of people and supplies needed, and estimating the time involved. An ad hoc group of Orange County corporations selected the zoo pro-

ject from numerous agency requests.

In addition to the one-day project, the South Orange County Volunteer Center has selected six companies to help increase and enhance their volunteer programs. The program also will identify and form an employee steering committee to select the best suited type of volunteering for that corporation.

"The Workplace in the Community program is enabling us to give exceptional tools to companies to easily involve their employees in community projects," said Katz. "It has produced a running record that will give our program credibility."

As I See It

Hugh H. Jones, Jr., Chairman and Chief Executive Officer, Barnett Bank of Jacksonville, N.A.



Three years ago, the 900 employees of Barnett Bank of Jacksonville [Fla.] agreed to participate in ongoing volunteer projects with human service agencies in our community. Their efforts have brightened the lives of literally thousands of people and, as one office manager phrased it, "Their reward has been the gift of self-esteem and the smiles on the faces of our new friends."

Barnett Bank is only one company in the Jacksonville area whose employees are actively involved in volunteer work. Our efforts are enhanced by the assistance we constantly and consistently receive from Volunteer Jacksonville, our Volunteer Center.

While we have long known that good corporate citizenship positively affects the bottom line, Volunteer Jacksonville has taught us that involvement through volunteering goes beyond that to create a real sense of excitement...excitement that has spread throughout the bank. Dividends for employees come in the form of increased psychic income and productivity and a renewed feeling of pride in themselves and in Barnett.

We have an exceptional volunteer program, all made possible because Volunteer Jacksonville taught us how to stop and help when help is needed.

Dr. Ira S. Hirschfield, Executive Director, Evelyn and Walter Haas, Jr. Fund, and Board member, VOLUNTEER—The National Center

Volunteer Centers can strengthen an individual's relationship and commitment to his/her community, as well as improve the overall health and vitality of that community. My experience in working with Centers throughout the U.S. and in several other countries highlights three major areas in which they provide substantial contributions to their communities: (1) involvement with a broad spectrum of community issues; (2) outreach to a diverse pool of volunteers; and (3) harnessing the corporate community.



Centers that have made special efforts to recruit the unemployed, community elders, minority ethnic and racial groups, the handicapped, youth and other special target populations as volunteers, contribute a social and cultural richness to their community.

Many successful Volunteer Centers have found that once established, relationships with corporations and individuals who are employed by them produce substantial cash, non-cash and human resource contributions. Particularly through increased corporate employees' participation as board members and in a variety of other community-based volunteer activities, Volunteer Centers have created beneficial opportunities for the community, corporations and Center programs.