

# Building an Employee Volunteer Program

Employee Volunteer Programs (EVPs) are becoming increasingly popular with companies seeking new avenues for engaging with employees and other stakeholders. While EVPs are diverse in both their structures and the issues they address, corporations are seeing the value and impact of creating EVPs that leverage the internal capacity of the companies in order to shape their culture and reputation among their employees and the communities in which they operate.

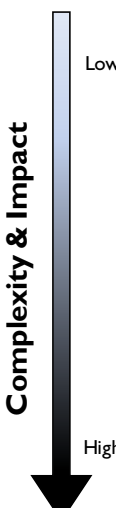
As EVPs are an emerging area of corporate community involvement, the models and frameworks established are ever evolving. Thus, it is essential for corporations developing EVPs to tailor their programs to the needs of their employees and key external stakeholders while anchoring the programs within their organization’s overall commitment to corporate responsibility.

An EVP is an employer-driven, managed and led program that seeks to motivate and engage its employees to volunteer. EVPs range dramatically from a company-sponsored “day of volunteering” around a specific cause, to a robust program where employees leverage their professional skills to support and build the capacity of not-for-profit organizations. This briefing is a synthesis of the leading thinking of experts and provides a roadmap for building an Employee Volunteer Program.

## APPROACHES TO EMPLOYEE VOLUNTEER PROGRAMS

While most corporations support some form of EVP, corporate volunteer initiatives are as diverse as they are numerous and vary by size, implementation model, structure, resourcing, desired and actual impact on the beneficiary and desired and actual outcome for employee volunteers.

The most common approaches to EVPs are *ad-hoc*, *strategic* and *innovative*. It is important to note that although the more complex, well established and strategic programs generate the most impact, not all corporations will develop *strategic* or *innovative* EVPs. Value exists in most EVPs that take into account the core needs of the business, employees and the beneficiary.

 <p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">Complexity &amp; Impact</p>	Low	<b>Ad-hoc</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Corporation recognizes that volunteering carries some value, but no business case or strategy has been developed</li> <li>• Corporation responds to volunteer requests as they emerge as no formal volunteering program exists</li> <li>• Employees tend to volunteer independently of the business (though paid-time off may be supported by the business)</li> </ul>
		<b>Strategic</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Corporation has researched the business case for a more robust and strategic EVP and understands the operating context, the associated social, environmental and economic issues and the needs of stakeholders</li> <li>• Executive leadership team is supportive and a senior champion has been identified</li> <li>• EVP is strategically integrated into the organization’s corporate community involvement strategy and required resources are devoted to program planning, design and implementation</li> <li>• Employees from across departments are engaged as champions to assess the needs of internal and external stakeholders, identify appropriate partners and recruit employee volunteers</li> <li>• EVP takes into account some measurement with an evaluation method to assess the level of success of the program</li> </ul>
	High	<b>Innovative</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Corporation invests significant resources in building unique, long term, multi-stakeholder partnerships with strategically aligned organizations and groups</li> <li>• EVPs generally includes multiple layers of volunteer opportunities that leverage the skills and assets of the business and its employees</li> <li>• EVP volunteer opportunities are integrated into a larger professional development strategy for the business and used to attract and retain talent</li> <li>• EVPs are continuously monitored and measured for impact regardless of whether managed internally by a dedicated corporate team or externally through an implementation partner</li> <li>• EVPs are integrated into a corporate Signature Program, integrating the organization’s culture, competencies and assets, community and employee interests, and core business strategy to deliver social and business impacts over the long-term, thereby benefiting the business as a whole</li> </ul>

This **Building an Employee Volunteer Program** is a synthesis of the best and leading practices in corporate volunteerism and was prepared by Stephanie Garrett and Blake Connoy, advisors at Canadian Business for Social Responsibility (CBSR).

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## DEVELOPMENT PHASES OF A SUCCESSFUL EMPLOYEE VOLUNTEER PROGRAM

The development of a successful EVP generally includes the following seven phases: build a vision, harness senior level support, establish a working group, assess current state, develop strategy & plan, implementation, and monitor, evaluate & report.

<b>Build a Vision</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The vision can be championed by passionate and enthusiastic employees from any department or level</li> <li>The vision becomes the foundation for galvanizing senior level support to move forward with scoping the possibility of developing an EVP</li> </ul>
<b>Harness Senior Level Support</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify a senior champion and establish senior level support early in the process to build and sustain momentum to create maximum impact</li> <li>An executive sponsor can serve as a chair to an EVP working group once senior level management has approved the scoping, planning and implementation of an EVP</li> </ul>
<b>Establish a Working Group</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Establish a working group of employees, managers, and potentially, community members, to generate excitement and energy about the EVP development, provide capacity for the preparation work that is involved, and to contribute unique and diverse perspectives on the best approaches and strategies in planning the organization's EVP</li> <li>Programs that are clearly employee-driven and employer-led have the most success</li> </ul>
<b>Assess Current State</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A robust 'current state' assessment takes into account the organization's internal and external operating context and provides the basis for:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Building a solid business case to present to the senior executive</li> <li>Making an informed decision about the type of program (ad-hoc, strategic or innovative) that is most appropriate</li> <li>Determining how to leverage the company's competencies and assets to maximize impact</li> <li>Establishing a baseline for monitoring the success of the program</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>Develop Strategy &amp; Plan</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A comprehensive strategic plan should include:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The business case as it relates specifically to the operating context of the company</li> <li>A clear vision, guiding principles, and cascading goals and objectives that are measurable and aligned with the overall corporate strategy</li> <li>Identification of the issue(s) and intended beneficiary(ies) of the EVP along with clear rationale for how these were selected and prioritized</li> <li>An articulated approach and implementation model (e.g., employee-led vs. company-led, general vs. skills-based, one-time vs. on-going, individual vs. team, single partner vs. multi-partner, and/or local vs. international)</li> <li>An explanation of the resourcing requirements and strategy for sustaining the program (e.g., financial, human resources/time, materials, and/or training)</li> <li>Identification of potential partners along with an analysis of the associated opportunities and risks of engagement</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>Implementation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The implementation phase includes the recruitment process, communication plan, employee volunteer policy, volunteer engagement &amp; program delivery plan, and a volunteer recognition component             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Recruitment process - defining roles and responsibilities, job descriptions, and volunteer selection (i.e., applications/appointments)</li> <li>Communication plan - consistent messaging by the EVP working group and medium(s) of communication</li> <li>Employee volunteer policy - demonstrate senior management support, formalize procedures, provide guidelines and communicate goals</li> <li>Volunteer engagement &amp; program delivery - employee training and monitoring employees', partners' and stakeholders' experiences</li> <li>Volunteer recognition - internal awards, recognition events, media articles, personal thanks you, partner recognition</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>Monitor, Evaluate &amp; Report</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Monitoring, evaluation and reporting are valuable as they are used to improve programming, enhance stakeholder relationships and increase a company's positive impact</li> <li>An EVP evaluation should always take into account three elements:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Business value and a return on investment</li> <li>Employee volunteer experiences and the impact of their contributions</li> <li>Stakeholder/beneficiary perceptions and actual impact on livelihoods and environments</li> </ul> </li> <li>The evaluation framework should collect data related to program inputs (invested resources such as time and money), processes (things done to support program activities), outputs (direct consequences of the activities undertaken), and outcomes/impacts (direct, indirect and societal benefits to the community created by the program)</li> <li>Key methods to achieving evaluation success include setting objectives, indicators &amp; targets early, ensuring measurement is participatory and Key Performance Indicators are shared, establishing a baseline, moving from output and numbers to impact and experiences, thinking long-term, monitoring continuously, allocating resources accordingly, evaluating the partnering relationship(s), and integrating broader monitoring &amp; evaluation systems</li> <li>Information gathering and analysis of the impacts of an EVP are only as important as how the results are communicated to key stakeholders and leveraged to improve programming</li> </ul>

### QUICK TIPS FOR SUCCESS

- Plan strategically with the end in mind - planning, short-term & long-term objectives, maximum impact
- Align EVP with strategic corporate issues - business priorities, stakeholder engagement, cross-functional
- Create shared value and partner proactively - position as a partner, not principal, communicate regularly
- Create an EVP that is measurable and sustainable - measure impact to the company, employees and beneficiaries