



AN INTRODUCTION TO

STRATEGIC VOLUNTEERISM

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BACKGROUND

Volunteerism is a crucial element of society and the nonprofit workforce in the United States, offering benefits to nonprofits, volunteers, and the community. However, funding for volunteer engagement has been challenging for many agencies. This guidebook is based on a qualitative study exploring the perspectives of leaders at 27 philanthropic organizations regarding volunteer engagement.

The guidebook serves as a resource to understand the dynamics of volunteer engagement, offering practical recommendations for both nonprofits and funders seeking to enhance their involvement in volunteer initiatives.

INTRODUCTION

Investing in Strategic Volunteer Engagement

Understanding the rationale behind investing in volunteer engagement is crucial for both nonprofits and funders. The positive impact of volunteerism on community perspectives, agency capacity, and overarching goals is significant. However, concerns about volunteer commitment, organizational capacity, and the return-on-investment pose challenges. Striking a balance between opportunities and barriers is the key theme explored in this section.

Findings from Research

Exploring the nuances of how organizations perceive volunteer engagement unveils a spectrum of approaches. While some view it as a means to amplify community voices, others see it as a capacity-building tool. Barriers include uncertainties about volunteer accountability, organizational capacity, and the perceived instability of a volunteer workforce. Despite the challenges, funders emphasize the need for compelling evidence and data to justify increased support for volunteer involvement.

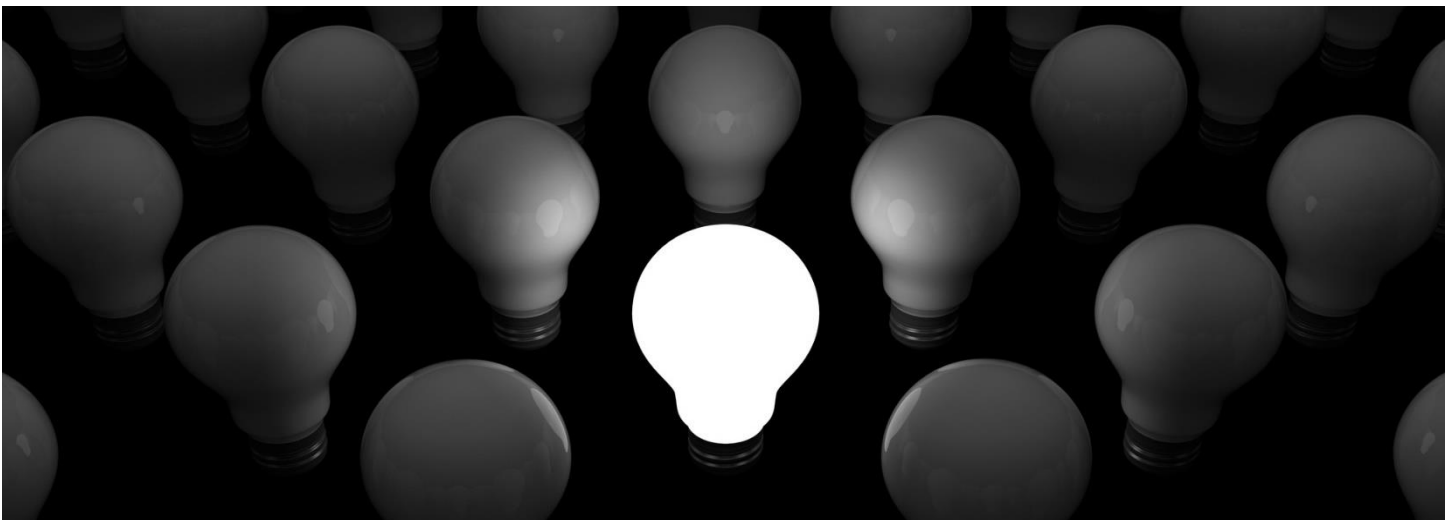


Figure 1

Insights

Volunteer engagement, often hailed as a positive force, faces complexities in practice. Labels and conceptualizations vary, hindering a unified understanding. Volunteers, essential to nonprofits, sometimes operate in the shadows due to challenges in tracking and measuring their impact. Funding for volunteer engagement is found to be narrow and fragmented, requiring a holistic approach. Tensions in investing arise from concerns about volunteer quality, accountability, and the uncertainty of outcomes.

Recommendations

Wrestling with uncertainty is inherent in volunteer engagement. Gaining clarity on beliefs about volunteers, defining explicit goals, and making volunteer efforts visible are essential steps. Holistic funding, incorporating operations and multi-year grants, is encouraged to address ongoing needs effectively. Managing tensions involves fostering open dialogues about concerns and recognizing the cumulative challenges that affect funding support for volunteer engagement.

CORPORATE VOLUNTEERISM

Volunteerism plays a pivotal role in corporate social responsibility, offering companies a unique opportunity to contribute positively to society. This step-by-step guide provides a comprehensive roadmap for companies looking to establish and launch an effective corporate volunteer program.

Define Objectives and Goals

Clearly articulate the purpose and goals of your corporate volunteer program. Align these objectives with the company's values and mission. Whether it's community impact, team building, or skill development, having well-defined goals will guide the program's design and execution.

Leadership Buy-In

Secure support and commitment from top leadership. A corporate volunteer program is most successful when there is enthusiastic backing from executives. Communicate the benefits of the program in terms of employee engagement, community impact, and overall corporate reputation.

Establish a Cross-Functional Team

Form a dedicated team to oversee the development and implementation of the volunteer program. Include representatives from various departments to ensure diverse perspectives and skill sets are considered. Assign clear roles and responsibilities to each team member.

Employee Input and Engagement

Seek input from employees to understand their interests and causes they are passionate about. Engage them in the decision-making process to foster a sense of ownership and enthusiasm. Consider conducting surveys or focus group sessions to gather valuable insights.

Research and Select Community Partners

Identify local nonprofits or community organizations aligned with your company's values and goals. Establish partnerships based on shared objectives. Consider the causes that resonate with employees and contribute to meaningful and sustainable community impact.

Design Flexible Volunteer Opportunities

Create a variety of volunteer opportunities to accommodate diverse employee interests, skills, and schedules. Offer both one-time events and ongoing initiatives. This flexibility ensures broad participation and caters to the diverse preferences of your workforce.

Develop a Communication Plan

Craft a comprehensive communication plan to keep employees informed about the volunteer program. Utilize internal communication channels such as newsletters, intranet, and team meetings. Clearly communicate the goals, upcoming opportunities, and success stories.

Implement Volunteer Training

Provide training sessions for employees participating in volunteer activities. This could include orientation to the chosen community partners, guidance on the specific tasks involved, and information on the impact their efforts will have.

Establish Measurement Metrics

Define key performance indicators (KPIs) to measure the success of the corporate volunteer program. Track metrics such as employee participation rates, community impact, and feedback from both employees and community partners. Regularly evaluate and adjust based on the data collected.

Recognition and Celebration

Recognize and celebrate the contributions of employees to the corporate volunteer program. Acknowledge milestones, share success stories, and showcase the positive impact on the community. Recognition fosters a sense of pride and encourages sustained engagement.

By following these steps, companies can create, develop, and launch a corporate volunteer program that not only aligns with their values but also enhances employee engagement and makes a meaningful impact in the communities they serve.

Companies that invest genuinely in employee volunteerism Receive many benefits. These programs take time and dedication to develop and to specialize in specific company cultures, but those companies that do will have many reasons to continue supporting these important efforts.

Statistics

60%

60% of companies provide employees with paid time off dedicated to volunteerism.

40%

40% of Fortune 500 Companies offer volunteer grants.

52%

Companies see 52% less turnover among new employees who participate in corporate giving programs like volunteer days.