



Skills-Based Volunteering for Small Businesses: Getting Started

The participation of small businesses is an important part of the pro bono movement, as all companies can share their time, talent and expertise to increase the impact of efforts to advance social change. That is why A Billion + Change, a national campaign to mobilize billions of dollars of pro bono and skills-based volunteer (SBV) services from corporate America, has developed this short overview and checklist that small businesses can use to help launch their SBV programs. It includes new trends and models of SBV programs, the benefits of SBV, tips for program strategy, implementation and evaluation, and helpful resources to connect you with volunteer opportunities.

Defining Skills-Based Volunteerism

Skills-based volunteering (SBV) and pro bono service is a powerful driver of social change. It is a unique approach to community engagement that matches employees' workplace skills, expertise and knowledge with nonprofit needs to increase their impact in the community. By leveraging all types of skills, from IT support and strategic planning to marketing and HR consulting, SBV helps nonprofits expand their reach and become more sustainable, while allowing employees an opportunity to build their leadership skills, and give back to a cause they believe in.

Creating Value for Your Company and Your Community

There are many benefits of skills-based volunteering, which include:

- **Skills-based volunteering (SBV) is a talent management tool:** SBV can be an effective way to cultivate critical business skills in your workforce. According to new research from True Impact, skills-based volunteers are 142% more likely to report job-related skills-gains than traditional volunteers (True Impact 2012).
- **Culture:** For many small businesses, giving back to their communities through skills-based volunteering is "in their DNA."
- **Engaging younger workers:** Pro bono programs could provide valuable learning opportunities for millennials. Skills-based volunteers are 47% more likely to report high satisfaction from volunteering than traditional volunteers.
- **Business development:** Small businesses have reported that skills-based volunteer programs that allow them to engage with their community are a great way for them to make business connections and build their brand.

- **Achieve high-impact social change:** For many nonprofits, the value of skills-based volunteer services can be 500% greater than the value of traditional volunteer services.

Trends in SBV

More and more Americans are volunteering, as people become more passionate about civic engagement and making a difference in their communities. This is particularly true for Baby Boomers and millennials, who are most active in service. This surge in interest in volunteerism coincides with the dire need many nonprofits have for support, as they face resource constraints at the federal, state and local levels. At the same time, however, many nonprofits are not prepared to manage volunteers, making effective volunteer management systems, processes and support critical to the success of an SBV program.

Skills-Based Volunteer Models

Consider these SBV models as you think about how to launch your own pro bono program in a way that supports your business and your culture.

- Marathon Model:** Conduct your pro bono project within a short timeframe (usually 24 hours) to deliver a mass volume of services
- Open-ended Model:** Make your services available to a set number of nonprofits on an ongoing basis
- Micro-volunteering:** Expand service opportunities to employees with all types of schedules through micro-volunteering opportunities, such as through Sparked.com
- Coaching and mentoring:** Do your employees have culinary, hospitality, retail or tutoring skills? Partner with a nonprofit and lend your functional expertise
- Standardized Team Projects:** Employees are placed on a team with set roles, responsibilities and deliverables
- Loaned Employee Model:** Grant your employees an approved and compensated leave of absence to offer volunteer services to a nonprofit

Where Do I Start?

Assess Your Needs and Competencies

As you build your SBV program, answer the following questions:

- What unique skills and competencies do your employees possess?
- How much time and resources do you have to manage and support a volunteer program?
- What professional skills can employees gain from SBV and what will inspire and motivate employees?
- Will you have internal buy-in from management?
- Are you in a position to offer paid time off to employees for volunteering? If so, how much time can you give them for volunteer service?

- Consider whether you would like to have your employees volunteer on an ongoing basis, or whether you would like your SBV program to take place in a well-defined timeframe during the year. If this is the case, you might consider designating a certain “Pro Bono Day,” “Weekend” or “Pro Bono Week” for your SBV program.
- Consider whether you would like to align your volunteer program with a strategic area of focus for your business (such as education, nutrition or healthcare), or whether you would like your employees to determine which causes they volunteer for.

Assess the Nonprofit’s Needs and Readiness

- Identify nonprofits which might be a good fit with your company’s goals. You might consider working with a HandsOn Action Center to connect you with an appropriate nonprofit.
- Assess the nonprofit. Determine if it has a defined mission, strategy and financial management system in place.
- Determine an area that is essential to the nonprofit’s mission, but may be underfunded or under-resourced. Use your employees’ skills to support the improvement of this area.

Develop a Scope of Work

- Agree to a set of deliverables, timeframe, project leadership and points of contact and support for both the nonprofit and employee volunteer(s). Document them.
- Work with the nonprofit to create agreed-upon expectations.
- Determine how the project’s success and impact, both to the nonprofit and the community, will be measured.
- Discuss and draft a post-project support plan. This step will help ensure the sustainability of both your efforts, and will help the nonprofit maintain your pro bono recommendations or services after the project has ended.

Implementation

- Match volunteers to projects based on their interests and skill-sets, or encourage them to find a volunteer opportunity through online matching services like VolunteerMatch, Catchafire or Sparked.com.
- Implement SBV programs slowly, and apply a similar process to other nonprofit projects.
- Manage expectations throughout the project.
- Track and report volunteer hours and the value of their contributions.
- Monitor project milestones. Re-assess and adjust program scope if necessary.
- Build interest in your SBV program by inviting volunteers from other businesses to share their experiences, or by allowing employees to suggest their favorite nonprofits or causes.

Evaluation

- Measure the project’s success and impact to the nonprofit and the community against the indicators and metrics outlined in the scope of work.

- Issue a survey (consider Survey Monkey or other web-based survey tools) to your employees to assess the impact of their volunteer assignments on: engagement, skill-development, leadership development and other factors important to you.
- Reflect on what went well and what didn't go well in the project and determine how that can be improved in the future.

Recognition

- Recognize and celebrate volunteers for their work and their project's results. Consider an employee volunteer spotlight in your business newsletter or an employee volunteer award.
- Gather testimonials, pictures and stories from your nonprofit partners and employee volunteers and communicate this internally and externally to local and national media.

Resources

Online Resources: Volunteers can search for volunteer opportunities and support materials using these online resources.

HandsOn Network:

A HandsOn Network Action Center can help monitor your project and provide support to ensure that both the nonprofit and your volunteers are reaching their goals. There are Action Centers in more than 240 communities across the country, facilitating more than 30,000 projects a month.

All for Good:

All for Good is a hub for volunteerism and community service on the Internet, and a service of Points of Light.

VolunteerMatch:

VolunteerMatch offers a variety of online services to support a community of [nonprofit](#), [volunteer](#) and [business leaders](#) committed to civic engagement. Its internet recruiting tool engages more than 88,000 nonprofit organizations.

Catchafire:

Catchafire improves the quality of the volunteer experience by providing pro bono opportunities for skilled professionals.

Idealist.org:

Idealist connects people, organizations, and resources to help build a world where all people can live free and dignified lives. The website offers thousands of volunteer opportunities worldwide.

SkillsForChange.com:

SkillsForChange (powered by Sparked) allows employees to volunteer in under an hour. With an experience as easy as using Facebook, SkillsForChange allows your employees to complete small volunteer projects right from their computer.

[CauseCast:](#)

CauseCast was founded by technology entrepreneur Ryan Scott, and helps leading brands develop public service campaigns. Through its Community Impact Platform, CauseCast helps organizations become better global citizens through increased volunteer and fundraising engagement around social change. The Community Impact Platform provides a centralized solution for volunteering, giving, matching, and rewarding, and helps organizations manage cause campaigns ranging from disaster relief to competitive social fundraising.

Advisory Services and SBV Tools: These organizations offer more in-depth consulting and advisory services, and can also provide you with online software and tools to manage and measure your SBV program.

[Taproot Foundation](#)

[Common Impact](#)

[True Impact](#)

Intermediaries:

[HandsOn Network](#)

[Corporate Volunteer Councils](#)

You may be next door to a network of volunteer resources! Corporate Volunteer Councils (CVCs) are "local" networks that businesses join to share effective practices and address community needs through workplace volunteering.

The Points of Light Corporate Institute is the go-to resource for community-minded companies looking to build and expand effective employee volunteer programs. With our global network of 250 affiliates and a team of experts, we can help you create a customized volunteer program, engage your employees, learn best practices, network with other leading companies, and gain visibility for leadership and excellence.

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