



4.0 Volunteers

Employer Supported Volunteering

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Introduction

Employer Supported Volunteering (ESV), also known as corporate volunteering, gives employees the opportunity to volunteer during working hours and become involved in causes which are important to them and their organisation.

Organisations recognise, as part of their social responsibility agenda, their impact on communities in which they operate and through **ESV**, employees are enabled to support community organisations and charities with their time and skills.



Image: Group of volunteers

In turn employers recognise that supporting their own staff to get involved in the community is also good for business – it creates a win-win situation.

There are many types of **employer-supported volunteering (ESV)** programmes to assist employees to volunteer, both in their own time and in work time.

Different approaches to ESV

Different employers will choose different approaches (or a combination of approaches) to support their staff to volunteer, depending on their organisational culture and business needs. Some approaches are described below, and all are valuable.

Using professional skills

Offering your professional skills to a third sector organisation can be an **invaluable benefit to that organisation** who may not have these particular skill sets. Volunteers can get involved in and resource valuable developmental projects.

Whilst providing the volunteer with experience, which can enhance their skills and understanding of the third sector or interest group, the receiving project has an appropriately skilled person to work on projects they may otherwise not be able to resource. Potential projects could include feasibility studies, community consultations, marketing plans, or event planning.

One-off team events

Team volunteering events are organised in partnership with a third sector organisation (or a school or hospital), for example painting and decorating, gardening or conservation and environmental activities.

Less traditional activities include building and testing emergency shelters for use in disaster zones, organising an 'introduction to the workplace' day for students with a sight impairment, or organising charity fundraising activities.

The 'host' organisation benefits from seeing a project undertaken and completed. Team members and employers benefit too, from team building, new insight and the satisfaction of having accomplished something new.

Mentoring

There are many established mentoring schemes which require volunteers. These include schemes working with offenders, unemployed/economically inactive people, young people starting up in business and in schools. Mentoring helps volunteers to develop their coaching and listening skills, as well as having a huge benefit for the 'mentees'.

Board membership

Volunteers serve on boards of schools, public involvement projects or on the management committee of a third sector organisation. Board membership provides the opportunity to apply skills and experience to a totally new environment and context. Being a trustee can also help to build social contacts, broaden experience and develop new interests.

The Business case

Many employers have found that supporting their staff to volunteer has benefits for all concerned:

Benefits to the community

- Skills and resources of employees can help to support projects and initiatives
- Increase in the pool of volunteers available
- Building links between the employer and the community

Benefits to the employee

- Use their existing skills to support a community project
- Develop new skills and have different experiences
- Have the opportunity to perform a wider range of tasks than they have in the workplace
- Meeting new colleagues/contacts
- Better understanding of a related/client sector

Benefits to the employer

- Improved relationships with stakeholders, the local community and the wider community
- Motivated employees
- Opportunities for training and development outside of what is usually offered
- Fun way to develop staff and teams
- Good PR, maintaining a positive brand image

Issues to consider

Employer supported volunteering programmes need to suit the business needs and requirements of your organisation. Here are some key issues to consider:

Paid time off

Some employers offer time off to their staff to get involved in voluntary activities. Others will not be able to offer this. Whatever the organisation decides, it is helpful to have a policy to make clear what the arrangements are.

For example, do you:

- Offer 'x' number of days paid special leave per year to allow staff to volunteer
- Ask staff to match their volunteering time
e.g. one hour of their own time and one hour of paid time off
- Encourage staff to volunteer but cannot offer paid time off so staff will need to volunteer in the evening or at weekends or book annual leave, or to make use of flexi-time arrangements

Insurance and health and safety

Employer supported volunteers are covered by employment law when volunteering on an employer supported project (including off-site and out-of-hours volunteering). Employers have a 'duty of care' to reduce the likelihood of employees being harmed as a result of their volunteering activities. Employers will need to ensure that their insurance policy covers employees volunteering outside of their usual workplace.

All volunteering activities will need to be risk assessed. If you are working with a partnership organisation which arranges an activity for your staff, you need to ensure that the organisation carries out the risk assessment for you. Depending on your insurance arrangements you may also need to carry out a risk assessment.



For more information about health and safety and risk assessment see Information sheet:

4.8 Keeping Volunteers Safe

Recognition

Some employers award certificates, write feature stories about volunteers in internal and external communication, hold volunteering awards or offer letters of thanks. This kind of recognition will show volunteers that they are appreciated, and it can help to publicise the scheme and encourage others to get involved.

Some volunteers may not want too much public recognition and it is vital to check with the individuals concerned. Employers should also take care that they are recognising only volunteering that is **employer-supported**; some individuals who volunteer in their own time will not feel it is any of their employer's business to celebrate their achievements.

Barriers

In the recent research (**Time Well Spent**) in to volunteering, including **ESV**, some barriers to volunteering were identified which included:

- Lack of awareness of volunteering opportunities and availability of opportunities
- Competing work pressures
- A mismatch of needs from the host organisation and expectations of the **ESV** Volunteers
- Not enough interest generated from the employee group

The research **Time Well Spent** identified that **Employee Supported Volunteers** are less likely to be satisfied with their volunteering experience than non-Employee Supported Volunteers.

Below are some of the actions organisations can consider to help improve their employees experience and engagement:

- Make **ESV** more flexible – allow volunteers to become engaged remotely or volunteer closer to home
- Fit the volunteering around completing work priorities – which helps to take the pressure of employees having to juggle the demands on their time
- Make the opportunities '**more personal**' encouraging employees to be free to choose a cause or volunteering which is meaningful to them
- Recognise the importance of building sustainable and longer-term relationships with community organisations – the volunteering creates a pathway for further engagement and opportunities which can benefit all stakeholders
- Offer a broad range of opportunities which meet different needs and interests of your employees
- Consider how best to engage with smaller organisations within your community not just the larger, national charities



External Link

A link to the Time Well Spent survey, a national survey into the experience of volunteering across the UK.

[Time Well Spent survey](#)

Further Information

Contact your local Volunteer Centre to find out more about individual volunteering opportunities in your area.

Third Sector Support Wales

<https://thirdsectorsupport.wales/contact/>

Individual volunteering opportunities are publicised on the Volunteering Wales website.

Volunteering Wales

<https://volunteering-wales.net/>

Business in the Community Cymru

Business in the Community

<https://www.bitc.org.uk/business-in-the-community-cymru/>

Time Well Spent Report on ESV

NCVO

<https://www.ncvo.org.uk/policy-and-research/volunteering-policy/research/time-well-spent>



Cefnogi Trydydd
Sector **Cymru**

Third Sector
Support **Wales**

Third Sector Support Wales is a network of support organisations for the whole of the third sector in Wales.

It consists of the 19 local and regional support bodies across Wales, the County Voluntary Councils (CVCs) and the national support body, Wales Council for Voluntary Action (WCVA).

For further information contact
<https://thirdsectorsupport.wales/contact/>

Disclaimer

The information provided in this sheet is intended for guidance only. It is not a substitute for professional advice and we cannot accept any responsibility for loss occasioned as a result of any person acting or refraining from acting upon it.