

Philanthropy, Volunteerism, Corporate Social Responsibility

Corporate volunteerism reaps benefits for businesses

VOLUNTEER EDMONTON

It's a well-known fact that businesses play a key role in supporting and contributing to charitable and non-profit organizations.

From "dollars for doers" programs to matching employees' contributions to charities, the concept of corporate social responsibility can take on several forms.

While providing financial and in-kind donations has often been the method of choice, corporate volunteerism is fast becoming a popular alternative among businesses to highlight their commitment to the community.

Having formal policies and procedures integrated into a business strategy can lead to a win-win situation for all involved – non-profit organizations receive additional support while businesses gain an improved public image and relations with the surrounding community, and increased morale and productivity among staff.

With such obvious benefits, it's no wonder the 2004 *Canadian Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating* reveals that 49 per cent of businesses in Canada

already encourage their employees to volunteer their own time and 35 per cent are willing to accommodate employee volunteering during working hours.

While larger businesses are more likely to have formal policies and procedures in place, smaller businesses might lack the resources and manpower needed to manage a corporate volunteerism program.

It may seem like a daunting task, but spending a few extra hours a week organizing charitable work will prove to be a worthwhile investment for any business.

The Canadian Centre for Philanthropy's "Boosting Employee Participation" fact sheet offers a few tips on how to kick-start a successful corporate volunteer program.

Start by creating positive attitudes towards volunteering. Communicate the benefits of corporate volunteering and emphasize that participating is truly voluntary by letting employees make the choice to participate or not, and where to volunteer.

Next, make the program appealing – consider offering time off work as an incentive and ask employees what kinds of volunteer activities they would like to do. A volunteer opportunity that is personally meaningful will ensure employees remain committed and involved.

Most importantly, gather feedback from employees about their volunteer experience and recognize employees' volunteer contributions. A simple letter of appreciation or a feature in the company newsletter will keep employees motivated to volunteer and make them proud of their contribution to the community.

To learn more about corporate volunteerism, visit www.corporatevolunteering.ca.

Volunteer Edmonton, a program of the Support Network, works closely with the non-profit/voluntary sector to help promote the value of volunteerism in the city.

To learn how you can become involved in volunteering, visit www.volunteeredmonton.com.



Charities get help

from page 10

Their goal is always to improve the charitable sector's understanding of what it must do.

Charity Central's audience is both national and provincial. On a national level, the project launched a large, comprehensive, plain-language website in September 2009.

"The website is both an interactive learning medium and a collection of downloadable print resources," explains San San Sy, co-ordinator of administrative and community services. "It has multiple access points to accommodate the different needs of the registered charities."

For its provincial audience, in September 2008 Charity Central launched a toll-free helpline for Alberta's charities. To date, the helpline has answered inquiries

from all over the province about all kinds of issues. "Is a gift of service (helping to build a fence) eligible for a receipt?" "What's the definition of 'arm's length'?" "Does our church need to keep offering envelopes?" "Where on the T3010 do you report on fundraising income from a casino?" These are just some examples of the questions the helpline has fielded.

And what do the registered charities think about all this?

When asked about how she sorts through the myriad Income Tax Act rules, Kirsten Austin, treasurer of Edmonton Vocal Minority, laughs and responds: "Are you kidding? I have an accountant help me out." Austin continues, "If I had to do it all myself, I'd probably step down as treasurer.... Small charities like ours, we definitely need

help. We're just regular volunteers doing what we can. We don't know all the rules about the T30 blah blah blah."

Commenting on Charity Central, Austin says, "A service like that can only help. If there are actual people out there willing to answer questions about that stuff, then it's great. Especially for people trying to work it out by themselves."

Only time will tell what long-term results Charity Central will achieve. Yet, with each question that is answered and each charity that is helped, the project gets one step closer to reaching its goal of guiding Canada's registered charities through the ins and outs of the Income Tax Act.

For more information, visit www.charitycentral.ca.

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