The Global State of Health of Corporate Volunteering and An Agenda for the Future
Preparation for this project began in 2019: conceptualizing, operational planning, developing sponsors, recruiting the research team.

The research team met for the first time, a combination of in-person in Washington, DC and virtually in mid-February, 2020.

In March 2020, the world changed dramatically as the realities of the COVID-19 pandemic began to emerge.

This report presents what the research team has learned in the two years since, a time of unprecedented crisis and change for the concept and practice of corporate volunteering. Seven broad themes emerged:

- The emergence of a global corporate volunteer community.
- Resilience in a time of global crisis.
- Expanding the “big tent” of corporate volunteering.
- Reaffirming the case for corporate volunteering.
- The growth of virtual volunteering.
- Increased focus on skills-based volunteering.
- Emergence of younger employees as a leading force for volunteering.

Each of these is discussed in this chapter. In the following section, “An Agenda for the Future,” four major challenges to the field, also drawn from the research, are presented.
The Emergence of a Global Corporate Volunteer Community

A key goal of this research was to create a broad portrait of corporate volunteering as it is practiced throughout the world. The research team directly engaged with 80 companies headquartered in 32 countries. Collectively those companies are operating in upwards of 175 countries, employing well in excess of 8 million people. Their businesses range from high tech to knowledge-based to service provision to heavy industry to extraction, from primarily consumer focused to business-to-business. They are involving as volunteers in their programs employees and their families, their retirees, their suppliers, their customers and the community at large.

Although skills-based volunteering is rapidly growing, direct service remains at the heart of corporate programs. While the degree of their engagement with the Sustainable Development Goals varies widely, collectively they are involving volunteers in some way in virtually all of them. There is continuing growth of national networks through which companies can learn from, support one another and collaborate in their volunteering. Most important, companies throughout the world rapidly adapted to the COVID-19 pandemic, demonstrating their ability to creatively sustain their commitment to volunteering.

In addition, overview “state of health” research was done regionally in Africa, the Arab Nations, Asia-Pacific, Europe, Latin America and North America, illustrating that volunteering is not the province of global companies alone but has spread to regional and national companies. (Part Two of this report will include full reports from each of these regions). This illustrates the steady emergence of a truly global corporate volunteer community.
Resilience in a Time of Global Crisis

Overall, the field has shown great resilience in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic:

- Sustaining what was feasible of their existing programs.
- Responding to employee desires for pandemic-related short-term local assistance efforts.
- Transitioning to virtual what was appropriate for existing programs.
- Developing new virtual opportunities.

The pandemic brought a seismic shift to corporate volunteering worldwide, halting a wide swath of in-person programs, stimulating development of alternate online activities and redefining existing partnerships with NGOs. Leaders of corporate volunteer programs demonstrated their ability to respond quickly and creatively to the new realities of the world, adapting their volunteering to meet emerging and shifting needs in their communities and in the interests of their workforces. Decisions to move from in-person to virtual volunteering were critical in sustaining corporate programs.

At the same time, many companies gained a better understanding of the realities of their nonprofit partners. Potentially, this can lead to stronger, mutually beneficial partnerships and increased volunteer and financial support from the company. For example, many nonprofits could not move as quickly as companies wanted in making the transition from in-person to virtual programs which led companies to invest more volunteers, expertise and financial support to enhance their capability.

As a result of required lockdowns, many employees preferred to focus their volunteering “close to home,” often in their immediate locales with members of their family and with neighbors or friends. As many companies embrace some form of long-term “work-from-home” policies, this focus seems likely to continue, potentially leading to ongoing changes in the design and reach of company-sponsored programs.

Volunteering is helping many employees find balance in a destabilized world through positive actions that help them feel they are responsibly engaged contributors in helping others and sustaining their communities. This reinforces the value of volunteering to employee wellness.

Many companies reported an initial increase in employee volunteering after the onset of the pandemic followed by an overall decrease, as reflected in a May 2021 survey. The initial immediate impulse to “do something” was challenged by the length of shutdowns, disruption in work-home dynamics and growing “online fatigue.” It remains to be seen where the level of volunteering will settle as whatever the “new normal” will be emerges across the world.
Expanding the "Big Tent" of Corporate Volunteering

“Corporate volunteering is a ‘big tent’ that encompasses a broad range of activities, philosophies, approaches and management structures.”

That concept was first articulated in 2011 in "Global Companies Volunteering Globally,” the report of IAVE’s first global research on corporate volunteering, and further developed in "The Big Tent: Corporate Volunteering in the Global Age.”

Not only does that remain a central feature of corporate volunteering today, it also has grown in scope as companies are expanding their universe of volunteers beyond full-time employees. They are finding that a more inclusive approach to volunteering offers them an opportunity to build new, expanding volunteer communities that reflect a shared commitment to mutual respect, problem-solving, and sustainable growth.

Increasingly, companies are inviting others to join their volunteering – families of employees, retirees, business customers, retail consumers and even the public at large. And they are demonstrating it is possible to do so successfully. This broadens the volunteer workforce, builds community, increases the scope and impact of their work and benefits the company by actively demonstrating its values and commitment to social responsibility.

Underlying this development is recognition of continuous change in the workforce and in the business environment. The cohort of career employees who remain tied to their
companies after retiring with decades of service is shrinking. Workers with families and younger workers are seeking more from their employers than just “the job.” Consumers have demonstrated their growing preference for companies with demonstrated commitments to sustainability and social responsibility. Companies themselves are recognizing the value of building a shared social commitment into their business to business relationships.

It is an exciting and challenging new frontier for those responsible for their company’s volunteering. They are called on to:

- build new, mutually beneficial partnerships with business customers and suppliers.
- develop the systems required to effectively engage those from outside the company in their activities.
- create new messaging for new audiences.
- document the results and benefits to their company.

They are front-line actors in a significant cultural shift in the ways companies relate to external audiences through their volunteering.
First articulated in the mid-1980s, the case for corporate volunteering can be summarized easily: it is good for the community, good for the employees who volunteer and good for the company.

Those benefits echoed throughout the current research not as hypotheses to be tested but as received truths, the consensus belief. Indeed, for most companies, any measurement of the perceived value of their volunteer efforts is no longer to prove them but rather for management purposes.

It is assumed that the opportunity for employees to volunteer, for example, is beneficial to and generally held in value by those employees. Measurement of that is not so much repeated testing of a hypothesis but, rather, a way to learn what the nature of the perceived benefits are, how widespread they are and how they can be enhanced. That is, it is market research about the product of volunteering that can contribute to continuous improvement in program management.

Managers of volunteer programs hear fewer questions from those above them about why volunteering is important to do and more about what, how much and how to increase or improve. This is reflected in the examples collected throughout this research, affirming support from the C-Suite and, in many companies, the active personal engagement of top executives.

In many of the companies participating in this research, there was strong evidence that the rationale is understood and accepted in the C-Suite. The results are deliberate efforts to create and sustain an enabling environment for volunteering throughout the company.

This includes establishing a vision of high-quality, impactful volunteer programs, ensuring that appropriate resources are available to achieve that vision and that obstacles to it are removed from company policies and procedures. C-Suite executives also set important examples through their own personal volunteering and the messages they send, which further validate the rationale for and importance of their companies’ volunteer efforts.
The immediate availability of technology enabled companies to quickly adapt and respond to COVID-19 – shifting many existing volunteer programs from in-person to online, inventing new opportunities for employees to volunteer and sustaining the sense of community connection that is critical to support those volunteering. It proved to be the essential tool that kept corporate volunteering alive globally at the same time the world was shutting off in-person engagement.

But, in a larger sense over the past decade, technology has been steadily reshaping corporate volunteering overall.

- By offering the possibility of volunteering at a distance, at times more amenable to people’s lives, technology has enabled more people to volunteer not only in their own communities or countries but with a global reach.
- Companies have been able to create cause-focused communities of volunteers that learn together, plan together and act together, with some focused on the Sustainable Development Goals.
- Employees who could never consider taking time away from family and jobs now can have the opportunity to volunteer cross-border in programs that both engage their job skills and enable relationship-building with people in other countries and cultures.
- It has brought new subject matter focus for volunteers with the growing worldwide emphasis on STEM education for young people.
- Volunteers are able to build sustained relationships with vulnerable people who they may never meet in person but to whom they can offer support, not only in their own communities but throughout the world.
- The emergence of micro volunteering offers opportunities for people with busy, unpredictable lifestyles to contribute to everything from tagging photos in a museum collection to crowd mapping the spread of a disease to transcribing documents to monitoring elections to small acts of advocacy.
- Hackathons have grown both within companies and across companies to address important needs, from design of new products to formulation of potential solutions to critical local and global problems.

It is no longer necessary for people to “go somewhere to do something” to help others and to address local, national or global problems. With the leadership of creative social entrepreneurs, both inside and outside companies, and the support of the organized frameworks they are creating, people of all ages, skilled and unskilled, can contribute to solving critical human, social and environmental challenges throughout the world.
Increased Focused on Skills-Based Volunteering

Skills-based volunteering (SBV) is perhaps the fastest growing form of corporate volunteering. It recognizes the breadth of people’s skills and the ways in which they can be put to work to enhance individual lives, improve organizational effectiveness and contribute to community vitality. It is widely perceived as having greater impact and value than volunteering that is not deliberately designed around specific skills such as “days of service.”

While skills-based volunteering has existed for decades, there now is a rapid acceleration in its popularity among companies, employees and the communities they serve. It has become a core part of most corporate volunteer programs. Eligibility for participation has expanded beyond executives to include both professional and technical employees, with a growing emphasis on those with technology-related knowledge and skills. Nearly every company interviewed for this research indicated that they are planning for or are actively engaged in an expansion of SBV within their broader volunteer programs. Three reasons are cited for this:

- SBV can be highly beneficial to the nonprofit and public sector organizations served, bringing skills, knowledge and experience those organizations don’t possess and may not be able to afford in such areas as technology, finance, strategic planning, legal and marketing.
- Employees who participate can realize significant personal and professional gains as they are challenged to apply their skills in new and often more challenging contexts.
- Companies gain from SBV as their employees often come back renewed, with new perspectives, experience and networks that can benefit the business and yield favorable publicity, new customers and a potential pipeline of new workers.

Traditionally, SBV was reserved for professional employees – lawyers, accountants, engineers, medical staff, etc. Now, it is not uncommon to find vocational skills and those in craft jobs – for example, chefs, welders, carpenters, and gardeners – in demand for SBV.

Too often lost, however, may be recognition of other skills important in volunteering: core human skills of empathy, caring and supportive behavior and avocational skills that also bring value to those people and organizations served.
Emergence of Younger Employees as a Leading Force for Volunteering

The stories are legion of younger workers who seek out potential employers that have demonstrable commitments to social responsibility, including active volunteer programs. A scan of depictions on corporate websites and in sustainability reports show that the majority of the images related to volunteering are of younger employees. This likely is both a recruitment tool and a reflection of the reality of who their volunteers actually are.

Companies participating in this research reported that younger employees make up a higher proportion of those who volunteer than other age groups. They “bring new energy” and are driving the expanding use of technology in volunteering. Climate-related issues are a high priority for them and that carries over into their preferred volunteering. In some countries, they are leading the way on volunteering related to social justice issues.

They are at the forefront of broadening the definition of what constitutes volunteering. “Liking” and “clicking on” to indicate their support for programs or their positions on issues is part of their vision of being involved and taking action, of volunteering.

Early indications are that they also are at the forefront of grassroots-driven volunteering, both spontaneous and planned initiatives promoted by volunteers themselves within the broad umbrella of their companies. In some ways, this harkens back to the corporate volunteering of the 1970s when many programs were employee-driven with self-organization and management. Just as it did then, that may prove to be challenging as expectations grow for company-support of more overtly social-change-oriented activities.
An Agenda for the Future
Four major challenges for the future of corporate volunteering emerged from the research:

- Emerging into a Post-Pandemic World and Reimagining the Future.
- Coming to Scale: Doing More for Greater Impact.
- Creating a Volunteer-Friendly Environment in the Company.
- Becoming Global Leaders for Volunteering.

The purpose of this chapter is to look at each of these broad challenges and their component parts, with particular attention to actionable steps for the field to consider.
Emerging into a Post-Pandemic World and Reimagining the Future

Through adaptation, innovation and persistence, company after company throughout the world has been finding ways to sustain their volunteer programs and, in many cases, to launch new initiatives during the pandemic.

Now is the time to begin to assess and reflect on that work. What can be learned? What worked? What didn’t? What should be continued? What should be jettisoned? How can innovation be sustained as a “new normal” emerges post-pandemic? These are conversations to be undertaken within companies – with executives, program managers and volunteers – and with the organizations and communities they serve. Those issues also form an agenda to be discussed more broadly across the field at national and global levels to strengthen corporate volunteering and build sustained communities of practice.

Here are four specific issues to be confronted.

1. **Applying volunteering to issues of equity and social justice**

Since its very inception, corporate volunteering has focused on underserved communities. Most often, the focus has been on programs for youth in both school and community settings, on support for human service programs and on community development efforts. A high percentage of “hands-on” volunteering takes place in those communities – construction of playgrounds, renovations of schools, environmental projects, etc.

But there have been many fewer efforts to bring lasting social change through corporate volunteering, few programs designed to advocate for systemic institutional change.
Now, issues of social justice; racial, economic and gender equity; climate justice – all of these and more – are moving to the forefront of awareness, discussion and action throughout the world, particularly among younger generations. But, in general, explicitly addressing these issues has not been high on the corporate volunteering agenda.

Direct service volunteering certainly addresses the manifestations of those issues. But by its very nature it has limited impact on underlying causes and behaviors that perpetuate the problems. As companies are pressured to make public commitments and to take actions to address these larger issues, their volunteering must be a key aspect of their response. Importantly, that pressure increasingly is coming from their own employees, particularly younger ones, as well as from outside the company.

In the United States, there has been a steady growth of “employee resource groups” (ERGs) – defined as “voluntary, employee-led groups made up of individuals who join together based on common interests, backgrounds or demographic factors such as gender, race or ethnicity.” For many companies, these groups are at the forefront of building awareness of and responding to these issues. Some companies cited ERGs as important resources for and participants in their volunteer programs.

There also are emerging examples of companies facilitating the formation of employee volunteer groups focused on educating themselves and others on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and other issues. They are formulating potential actions they and their companies can take in response.

The work of volunteering is the work of change-making – for society, for those who volunteer, for those they serve and for the institutions from which they come. Companies that recognize and act on that will be at the forefront of what corporate volunteering will become in the years ahead.

2. Plotting the future of virtual volunteering

Clearly, the ability to move programs online was one of the saving forces in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic. It proved possible not only to adapt many programs so they could be continued virtually but also to initiate new programs specifically designed to be online. Greater numbers of people were offered opportunities to volunteer more conveniently. Work could be done globally as well as locally. Micro-volunteering enabled people to use small bits of time to tackle larger tasks with the cumulative work adding up to significant contributions.

But throughout the world, companies learned the reality that not all NGOs or public sector organizations with which they were working had the equipment, connectivity and expertise needed to effectively support virtual volunteering. They had to respond to the core issue of imbalance between themselves and the
organizations they sought to serve as well as to the larger issues of inequity of resources and access. It is clear that the expansion of virtual volunteering will require additional investment by companies to ensure that their community partners have what they need to participate fully and effectively.

Also, early enthusiasm of volunteers appears to have waned over time as “screen fatigue” set in and people sought a return to opportunities for the in-person engagement that has been at the heart of corporate volunteering. This has longer-term implications about potential turnover of volunteers and the related need for constant recruitment and support of new volunteers.

Virtual or not virtual? It is not a zero sum question. It is likely that, going forward, strong programs will include both in-person and virtual opportunities for engagement, each tailored to meet the expectations and realities of the employees, the company and the organizations they are serving. The questions are about the balance between the two, the relative investment to be made in each and an assessment of the return on that investment for all engaged.

3. Reimagining cross-border volunteering to meet new realities

Over the course of the pandemic, companies either redesigned cross-border programs to be virtual or cancelled them completely. But challenges to the model had arisen well before the pandemic. The programs are generally available only to a very small number of employees, usually more senior people with specific professional/technical skills. According to some companies, there is growing reluctance within that cohort to leave their jobs and families behind for weeks in order to participate. As companies globalize their operations, there may be less need for people to move around the world for what is often described as a professional development experience.

During the pandemic, some companies found they could do the same work virtually with recipient organizations in other parts of the world. However, they also recognized that, with
the loss of the immersion that comes with on-site work, much of the benefit of cross-cultural engagement was lost for both the volunteers and those with whom they were working.

Only a small minority of companies have significant cross-border programs. For some, the programs are the flagship for their volunteering effort. So, undoubtedly the concept will survive. But it remains to be seen whether there will be significant growth in the programs or whether a new model will emerge.

4. Redefining skills-based volunteering for inclusiveness and a renewed focus on excellence

Skills-based volunteering (SBV) has been, in one way or another, a core component from the very earliest corporate volunteering, initially in the form of “loaned executives” to help nonprofits with fundraising campaigns or to perform specific planning or consultative tasks. Today, some form of SBV can be found in the vast majority of corporate programs. But in most cases, they remain narrowly defined around people with professional or technical skills. Only a small minority of companies broadly define “skills” to include the full range of what people do on their jobs that might be relevant to serving the community.

Too rarely are companies actively seeking skilled “blue collar” or “line” workers, unless that group makes up a significant percentage of their employee base. Nor do most companies consider avocational expertise and skills as appropriate contributions to their SBV. By broadening their perspective on what constitutes a “skill,” companies can open themselves to wider participation by people with skills not normally offered to the community.

A clear challenge for those companies with SBV is to manage those programs in ways that focus on results, impact and excellence. That would mean treating them as a consulting firm might—extensively engaging with “customer” organizations, scoping and selecting volunteers based on their skills and the nature of the assignment. It would also entail ongoing case management to ensure expectations are being met and any problems promptly solved. Post-assignment assessment done by the company, the customers and the volunteers would be critical. That level of management would increase value and impact for all.
"Coming to Scale" – Doing More and Doing it Better for Greater Impact

There must be universal acceptance of a single global goal for corporate volunteering: to do more and to do it more effectively with greater impact. Anything less is to ignore the realities of the increasing level of need in the world, one that requires a massive sustained response from all sectors of society. To retain their broad “license to operate” corporations must demonstrate how their people, their knowledge, their influence and their leadership are contributing to that response.

This research illuminated three elements of the needed corporate response:

- A recommitment to the Sustainable Development Goals.
- Increased efforts to measure what constitutes “doing more”.
- A stepped-up focus on documenting “greater impact”.

Disney, Latin America
1. Recommitting to the Sustainable Development Goals

A key conclusion of this research has been that the UN’s 2015 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have proven to be educational, inspirational and aspirational but rarely truly and fully operational in corporate volunteering. In part, this is because corporations respond primarily and most directly to the SDGs through their core business functions and practices.

Some companies studied are working to adapt existing volunteering to better align with the SDGs and/or are developing new programs to address them. However, the majority only categorize their existing volunteering into the SDGs at the Goal level. They do little to adapt their activities to directly address the Goals and do not reach to the Target level, let alone to the Indicators.

It is much easier to demonstrate “contribution to” than “impact on” the SDGs. This reflects the complexity of the SDG structure as well as the overall lack of cost-effective ways of measuring the impact of volunteering. Companies can maximize the contribution their volunteer programs make toward achieving the SDGs by renewing their commitment and rising to these policy and operational challenges. Here are some essential steps:

1. **Increase the level of commitment.** Focus on increasing measurable impact, not just “contributing to” the SDGs. Make this the highest priority for volunteering and commit to sustaining the company’s investment through this decade.

2. **Move beyond categorizing current volunteering so it appears to connect to the Goals.** Instead, develop new initiatives and recast current programs so they specifically address actionable Targets within the Goals.

3. **Create broad, inclusive and substantive educational efforts about the substance of the Goals.** Enroll everyone related to the company – employees, families, customers, business partners – in collaborative efforts to learn, plan and act together in new volunteer initiatives.

4. **Develop meaningful volunteering-focused partnerships with NGOs, international agencies and other companies to maximize their contribution to and impact on the SDGs.**

5. **Publicly announce operational goals and targets for SDG-related volunteering.** Document and publicize the scope, nature and outcomes of the resulting work.
2. Measuring what constitutes “doing more”

It is extremely difficult to get accurate numbers across the field about how many people volunteer through corporate programs. There simply is no recognized global approach to collecting and reporting such data. Some companies report a percentage of employees who volunteer but do not specify the extent of that volunteering. Thus, when companies report mass participation in a “day of service,” it inflates the numbers of volunteers relative to those of companies that report only sustained volunteer engagement. Some report only the hours employees volunteer on company time while others include participation in company-related volunteering whenever it occurs. Some include everyone who participates in company-sponsored programs – including family members, retirees, community members, etc. – while others include only employees.

But an examination of what is reported plus anecdotal data plus discussions with companies through IAVE’s Global Corporate Volunteer Council and other corporate forums suggests that there is a generally low level of volunteering in sustained activity. Most corporate volunteering is in one time or short term group activities (“days” or “weeks” of service) with the highest numbers associated with these events. Also, reported numbers may come from environments in which not volunteering runs counter to overt pressure to participate, thus inflating overall numbers and raising doubts about reports of 100% employee involvement.

There has been little interest and thus little investment in attempting to develop a universal approach to reporting the nature and scope of corporate volunteering, one that can gain broad support from companies throughout the world and the NGOs, associations and consultants that help them implement their programs. This speaks to the reality that the “field” of corporate volunteering remains fragmented and distant from the realities of many companies.

**Serious leadership for development of a standardized, broadly supported methodology for measuring the dimensions of corporate volunteering must come from companies themselves,** working together to bridge conceptual hurdles and build practical tools that can work worldwide.

3. Documenting “greater impact”

Volunteering’s impact on and value to companies and their employees are now “received truths,” based on decades of internal and external research, analysis and documentation. In most companies, the current focus is how to sustain and increase that impact. Ongoing measurement and documentation within companies supports that work and enables companies to continuously improve their volunteering to make it more attractive and beneficial.
The real challenge lies in documenting and understanding impact and value for the recipients – the organizations, individuals and causes volunteering is intended to serve, the problems it seeks to solve.

To a great extent, this challenge stems from the complexity of defining impact, dealing with both conceptual and practical issues that surround its measurement and the significant investment required to quantify and “prove” impact. The incredible diversity of what corporate volunteers do and how they do it seems to mitigate against a single “one size fits all” approach, further complicating the development process.

It has been particularly difficult to do this in the context of the SDGs. The design of the Goals, Targets and Indicators was intended to be used at a macro level, with data typically generated at a country level. Data collection at the micro level, where corporate volunteering works, actually can be more complex, particularly given the typically short-term and focused nature of the intervention and its limited contribution to the overall effort and outcome.

Attempts to develop appropriate methodologies and tools to quantitatively measure impact across the field have floundered and ultimately failed. Thus far, there has not been high priority placed on sustained, collaborative development, testing and refinement of shared tools with compatible approaches, measures and data to serve the entire field. The most recent effort, by Impact 2030, ended prematurely when the organization ceased to exist.

Thus, the approaches to impact assessment generally remain company – and situation – specific.

What would it take to move forward a successful development effort to create the methodologies and tools needed to document the contribution of corporate volunteering toward addressing global problems at either the macro or micro level? Consider these five essentials:

- Sustained leadership from companies willing to invest their time, expertise, methodologies and experience to work in partnership around a shared goal: to create and validate open-source approaches that can serve the breadth of the field.
- Acceptance that this is not something that will be done overnight. There is no quick fix, no magic bullet; if there were, it would have been done by now. This is a marathon, not a sprint and that requires a willingness to make a long-term investment of time, talent and money.
- Engagement of people with the knowledge, skills and experience to lead the development effort, a combination of both people who have the conceptual and technical skills and those who know the field intimately, including those with a global perspective on corporate volunteering.
- Consideration of how best to build on assessment models already used by the organizations served by corporate volunteers to document and describe the value of that contribution.
- An openness to exploring qualitative approaches – documentation, case studies and storytelling – in recognition that not everything worth knowing and learning can be quantified and that examples of impact are appropriate stand-ins for broader quantitative data.
Why Worry About Impact?

Is this work that needs to be done? Isn’t the value of corporate volunteering obvious? Can’t we just assume that there is appropriately beneficial impact to those being served?

The rationale for corporate volunteering has long been based on its benefits to the community served, to the employees who volunteer and to the company. But the most important of those three must be to maximize its impact, its value to the people, the organizations, the needs and issues being served. How can that be accomplished without understanding the impact and determining how best to maximize it? That understanding leads to building the strongest case for volunteering.

It is important to remember that volunteering is only one of the ways companies invest in the community and the world. As leadership, circumstances, and external realities change for companies, those alternative approaches may end up in competition with one another for finite resources. It is important to have the evidence of volunteering’s impact and value— for community, company and employees – in hand well before that time comes.

In Korea, for example, some companies have become interested in Social Value Evaluation. Here is a description of how that might affect commitments to volunteering as reported by our research partner in Korea, Mr. Do-young Kim, CSR General Manager of SK Group in Korea, and Founder and Leader of the Korea CSR Forum:

[Companies] are beginning to evaluate how much employee volunteer activities actually create social value. Some people think that social value creation activities based on the core competencies of a company are much more effective than employee volunteer activities. There is a movement beginning to convert volunteering into other social contribution activities.

When the results of existing traditional volunteer activities were calculated as social value (monetary value), the results were very small compared to other social contribution activities.

For example, activities such as meal support and environmental improvement for the underprivileged had too little social value compared to other social contribution activities such as support projects for social enterprises, school violence prevention campaigns using media platforms, inclusive financial education projects, social investment, etc.

Therefore, companies began to think strategically about whether it would be more effective to reduce employee volunteer activities and increase other social contribution activities.
Creating a Volunteer-Friendly Environment in the Company

Sustained, impactful volunteering does not “just happen.” It is the result of careful planning, skilled management and, most of all, creating and cultivating a volunteering-friendly environment within the company. There are five critical elements to achieving that.

First, position community service broadly and volunteering specifically as an explicit expectation for the company as an institution and for everyone in it. Make it a shared value. This is the job of the C-Suite, an element of their bigger responsibility to shape and sustain the culture of the company. It must include clear sustained messaging, ongoing recognition of the volunteers and personal participation. The C-Suite rightly should have high expectations for what will be accomplished through volunteering, encouraging innovation and significant results. It also should ensure that all of the company’s stakeholders are aware of and understand the value of this work. As CEMEX put it, they expect their executives to be “the first ambassadors of volunteering policies.”

Second, it is critical to overcome the stubborn resistance of middle managers and human resources professionals. These were the two biggest challenges articulated by managers of volunteering during this research. Expectations must be set that middle managers will participate, will encourage those they manage to do so and will remove barriers to that participation. Human resource professionals do not recognize the contribution volunteering can make to the personal and professional development of workers and thus their resistance to collaborate. The reasons most often cited in both cases: a lack of clear expectation or accountability from above and an absence of positive recognition when it does occur.

Third, invite broad participation, moving beyond employees to include family members, retirees, customers, suppliers, etc. As reflected in the “Expanding the Universe of Volunteers: Family, Friends, Customers, Community Members” chapter, companies throughout the world have made real progress in expanding the universe of volunteers engaged in their programs. Not only does this expand the company’s volunteer contribution to the community, it also can enhance the company’s reputation among its key stakeholders.

Fourth, ensure availability of sufficient resources to manage existing programs and invest in developing new ones. Global programs must rely on implementation by employee volunteers in locations far from the
home office, ensure they are appropriately supported and recognized by their managers, and afforded released time from regular duties to undertake this work. Give them visibility and include this work in performance assessments and considerations for advancement. Encourage innovation in programming and provide appropriate budgets to enable it.

Fifth, recognize and reward the skills required to be an effective manager of a global volunteer effort. The people responsible for creating and sustaining corporate volunteering must play a wide variety of roles – builder of external and internal partnerships, long distance manager of diverse teams of volunteers, expert on and bridge builder across cultural differences, energizer of people’s desire to help, creator of innovative programs. They must exhibit a unique blend of skills to meet the expectations of multiple customers – executives, volunteers, community partners – in ever-changing internal and external environments.
"Beyond Painting Classrooms" is the theme of a series of conferences organized by FirstRand Ltd. in South Africa to bring together companies and community organizations to discuss how to increase the contribution and impact of corporate volunteering in the community. But what is the origin of the theme?

The story has been told so many times in so many places in so many ways that it has entered into the lore of corporate volunteering. The essence is that there are schools, youth and senior centers and other nonprofit organizations that regularly receive requests from companies for a short-term project that their employees can complete during their “day of service.” Isn’t there a classroom or other facility that needs to be painted? Or a playground that can be repaired? Or outdoor benches to be repainted? Or…? The common denominator is something physical that can be done quickly, that employees can point to as something they accomplished – and, ideally, something that helped them feel strengthened and empowered as a team.

The dark side of the story is that often there really is not such a project, but the recipient organization feels the need to create something because they want to either sustain or establish a relationship with the company in hopes that it will lead to financial support, more substantive volunteer engagement or long-term partnership. Thus, some organizations report the same room being repainted (or its equivalent activity) year after year because they do not want to alienate the company.

It becomes even darker for many community organizations when they discover that companies wishing to do volunteer projects with them do not understand that the organization will incur costs to have them. Companies have been known to ask for lunch to be provided, for supplies to be purchased for the project, for a project manager to be provided – and then be unwilling to cover those costs or to make a financial contribution to the organization. “We’re coming to help you. Why should it cost us any money to do that? Aren’t you grateful for our help?”

The reality, of course, is that there is a tremendous power imbalance between businesses and community organizations. Companies have the human, financial and reputational advantages. Too often they approach the community from a position of superiority, assuming there will be gratitude for whatever they are willing to give, without realizing what the actual costs to the organization are.

The challenge is to build meaningful partnerships that recognize and address this power imbalance from the outset. That does not happen spontaneously. It requires intentionality, time to develop, mutual respect for each other’s knowledge, skills and resources. Companies must recognize two realities:
They have the financial and human resources that can benefit community organizations, but

- It is the organizations that have the knowledge and expertise that can help companies make meaningful contributions to the organization’s work.

These realities were brought home to many companies during the COVID-19 crisis when they discovered their community partners did not have the skills, equipment or people power to support a quick transition of existing employee volunteer activities from in-person to virtual. The greatest success in making that shift quickly and effectively was when the companies involved recognized that they had the resources the organization needed – expertise, people, equipment, etc – and were generous in making those available as part of their ongoing relationship.

Meaningful partnerships are not easy to build and sustain. They require hard work, open communications and shared commitment to:

- Learn about and appreciate one another’s realities.
- Creatively join their respective expertise and resources.
- Build trust through open communication and shared responsibility.
- Learn together about what works and what doesn’t, identifying and addressing problems.
- Assess the impact they are having and the benefit each is getting from their work.
- Regularly reassess the nature and viability of the partnership.

**Because of the inherent power differential, it is critical that companies recognize that it is primarily their responsibility to work toward these partnerships.**
Becoming Global Leaders for Volunteering


Dr. El-Ali concluded from her review: “The world is facing a constellation of crises, which are negatively impacting societies and hampering progress towards achieving the Global Goals. The impact of COVID-19 and its interaction with social, economic and environmental challenges has led to increased urgency around creating an enabling environment for supporting volunteering.”

The global business community is a critical element in creating and sustaining that “enabling environment.” Because of their reach, visibility, resources and capacity to contribute, global companies have high potential to contribute meaningfully to that task.

At the end of the day, it is not enough for companies to have great volunteer programs or to encourage other companies to get involved. They also must become active advocates for volunteering writ large. Their knowledge, their resources, their skills, their images and their reach can make a critical difference -- particularly in communications. They can bring to life and sustain the needed enabling environment for volunteering.

The phrase “enabling environment” first emerged as a developed concept in the 2015 State of the World’s Volunteerism Report produced by United Nations Volunteers (UNV). Many ways have been put forward to describe the “enabling environment” for volunteering. The following six requirements encapsulate the primary elements as IAVE views the concept.

- Provide a supportive legal and regulatory framework that gives permission to volunteer and removes barriers to involvement.
- Support a viable infrastructure of national and local organizations that have as their primary purpose to promote volunteering, ensure the safety of volunteers and provide appropriate training and resources as well as effective program management.
- Create high public visibility for volunteering that reinforces its value – to society broadly, local communities, the public sector and non-governmental organizations and to the volunteers themselves.
- Encourage opportunities for everyone to get involved by volunteering their time, talent and energy, with proactive work to remove barriers to participation.
- Build capacity for volunteer-involving organizations – NGOs, community-
based groups and public sector agencies – to ensure they are equipped to plan and prepare for volunteer involvement. They must be able to manage volunteers effectively and ensure the development of the necessary knowledge and skills to make the greatest contribution. And they must document and make visible the work and its impact.

- Promote leadership through public advocacy on behalf of volunteering and through creation of corporate volunteer programs with openness to engaging people beyond active employees as well as visible, substantive leadership for and investment in development of infrastructure to support volunteering.

The business community as a whole, and individual companies specifically, can lead the way in ensuring such an environment is developed and sustained – through advocacy, leadership, engagement and investment.

### Essential Elements for Global Leadership in Volunteering

As illustrated in the “Becoming Global Leaders for Volunteering” chapter, companies can aspire to and achieve integrated global leadership for volunteering. Essential elements of such leadership include:

- A sustained, long-term commitment to volunteering as a priority part of company culture
- An aspiration to be a leader for the field, including as a thought leader
- High priority on innovative, impactful volunteering to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals
- Demonstrated support and personal engagement from the C-suite
- Active public advocacy for volunteering, including partnerships with NGOs, governments and other companies to develop and promote high-impact volunteering

- Financial investment in support of volunteering as a priority through the company’s philanthropy
- Invitation to others to volunteer, moving beyond active employees to include other companies, retirees, families, customers, vendors and the general public
- Service on behalf of local, national and international leadership organizations for volunteering
Corporate Volunteering for a Post-Pandemic World