Volunteers Are Key to Managing Corporate Volunteer Programs

Creating and sustaining global volunteer programs takes strong leadership and management skills, energy, imagination, attention to detail and time. Few companies provide full-time, year-round staff in all of the places where they operate to create and manage their volunteer programs. Those in global leadership roles, often but not always based at the global headquarters, must rely on colleagues assigned on a part-time basis, frequently as part of broader community relations responsibilities or increasingly on volunteers spread throughout the company. Acting individually or in teams, those volunteers take responsibility for implementing global programs or creating their own localized projects at the country or local level. In some companies, the result is their own hierarchy of leadership for volunteering, driven by energized individuals and teams. Extended to the local level, that means hands-on project management – assessing needs, identifying opportunities, building appropriate community partnerships, planning activities and recruiting and managing volunteers. Companies rely on this distributed leadership and management, tied together virtually for mutual support, to drive both global and local high-priority initiatives.
Many companies engage retirees as volunteers. But CaixaBank especially stands out, as they actively engage retirees to organize and run volunteer programs in every community where the bank is present. From big cities to small villages, they are there, helping maintain relationships with more than 16,000 different social entities with which the bank does business and serves through their philanthropy and volunteering. Their management philosophy is all-inclusive, consciously designed to make “room for everyone.” Prior to retirement, many worked in leadership positions at the bank. Now, as volunteers, they use their expert management skills and free time to share their experiences with new employees, serve as examples of volunteering and play an invaluable role in the success of the program. Retirees account for about 19% of Caixa volunteers.
Established in 2015, the **InterCement Institute** is one of the strongest employee managed programs identified in the study. It has three components:

- **CIVICOs** are local committees made up of InterCement employees in each unit of the company. They work with the InterCement Institute for the management of social investment in their geographic area. Each committee is made up of at least five employees and functions as an extension of the Institute within their production unit. Participants receive regular training to develop and improve the skills and competencies necessary for social mobilization.

- **The Community Development Committee (CDC) Group** operates within defined geographic areas where the company operates. It is made up of government representatives, civil society organizations, community leaders, companies and CIVICO members. CDCs define strategies and promote actions that contribute to community development.

- **Ideal Voluntary Action Groups** (GAI/V for its initials in Brazil) are formed by employees, friends, family and community actors motivated to organize and carry out volunteer work locally. The leadership of these groups is exercised by InterCement employees.
Itau’s Mobiliza Itau Committees represent an innovative example of employee-driven volunteering. They provide guidelines, training and support so that the volunteers are able to establish partnerships with NGOs. Volunteers commit to report their actions through online storytelling on a dedicated company website.

Employee Resource Groups (ERG), or Employee Networks, a popular corporate employee affinity group structure, is another resource that corporate volunteer leaders sometimes rely upon. They are groups formed by and for employees and led by employee volunteers. ERGs provide a forum for employees with a common interest where they often bring their collective voices together to inspire and mobilize employee engagement, define projects, find partners and run programs. Volunteer projects provide a way for Employee Resource Groups to stay visible in the company, and to promote the priorities of their constituencies (i.e., Black/African American ERG, Parents ERG, LGBTQ+ ERG, etc.).

VISA has a centrally organized, signature global program where employees mentor small businesses. In addition, the company provides programs, tools and resources that enable local leaders to organize in-person and virtual volunteer events. Individual offices have their own Community & Volunteering Councils to facilitate employee participation at the local level with leaders in individual offices identified through self-nomination and nomination by executives in the office or region. Employee Resource Groups also organize volunteering events and activities.

State Street Corporation’s global volunteer program, State Street Volunteers, is managed with one full time staff member located at the company’s headquarters in Boston, Massachusetts. Community Support Program Committees are in place in 38 offices, leveraging the commitment and skills of employee volunteers to manage the program. They help select and implement volunteer projects and provide valuable insights to adapt the projects to best meet local needs.

State Street has 24 Employee Networks, each of which has a Community Engagement chairperson and committee, supported by a Global Inclusion, Diversity and Equity team. They recommend and help to design volunteer opportunities that fit and reinforce the purpose of each network. For example, the Professional Women’s Network volunteers with the Girl Scouts; the Working Parents Network volunteers for a nonprofit daycare center.

Schneider Electric Delegates – local employee volunteer ambassadors – are nominated for a period of at least two years. In addition to their responsibilities at work, they have very specific roles in support of the company’s Foundation. Delegates identify local NGO partners, follow-up on volunteer assignments and recruit employees to volunteer. Currently the Foundation works with 130 Delegates worldwide.
Sage defines its approach as “action philanthropy” as it focuses on empowering employees to contribute through volunteering and fundraising. The company’s employee volunteering model is entirely free choice. All employees are allowed five paid days off each to volunteer for a cause they are passionate about. Sage Foundation managers organize volunteer events around their priorities of digital inequality, economic inequality and protecting the planet. Employees can join those initiatives or organize their own volunteering with any charitable organization of their choice.

Volunteer Ambassadors help the Sage Foundation managers coordinate volunteer projects. Being part of the Ambassador community is considered as employee development and includes dedicated learning opportunities. Annual awards recognize participation and outstanding performance, and a global conference brings Ambassadors together for joint learning once a year.

Cargill Cares Councils has a more formalized structure than most. CSR and volunteer activities are organized through 350 Cargill Care Councils, which exist in all countries where Cargill has a presence. The Councils meet regularly, have budget authority, and evaluate the impact of Cargill’s efforts in the community.

TELUS Community Boards extend across the globe and include elected members who serve a term of three years. They support local registered charitable programming, help in building stronger communities and foster wellness to help vulnerable youth thrive through health and technology initiatives.

PIMCO Acts Councils, a type of volunteer steering committee, are run at the local office level. The councils comprise champions who work together to source, organize, and execute initiatives with guidance and support from headquarters. They are integral to the success of PIMCO’s volunteer programs as an important source of information on cultural differences and specific community needs.

Some companies acknowledge the time commitment required to execute programs worldwide and make allowances for employees to step away from their full-time roles in order to lend their skills to manage volunteer programs. At Microsoft, employees from around the company are seconded for four months to manage its annual October Giving campaign and support around 5,000 volunteers to help scale the campaign.

Initially, in 2004, S&P Global had a Global Volunteer Day, which later became Community Impact Month. In 2019, the company decided to become more strategic and shifted to a year-round model, Essential Impact, designed to be more conducive to thoughtful and longer-term volunteer engagements and more responsive to community needs. S&P Global felt its three priority areas – creating an inclusive economy encompassing underserved populations, bridging the global skills gap and promoting a sustainable environment – would benefit from a longer-term approach. Recently the company added a new paid time-off policy, Give Back Days, totaling 40 hours per year per employee. For this reason they needed additional support to implement volunteer programs.

S&P Global Team Leaders or Ambassadors are situated in each of the 35 countries where S&P does business. They are responsible for completing post volunteer event reports that include the number of volunteers and other basic facts. They also upload photos, videos and a blog post onto the company internet and on social media. They thank all volunteers, provide them with certificates and survey them to determine their reactions to the volunteer activity. Did it boost their morale; help team building, assist in the development of new skills? The survey also asks how the volunteer project could be improved in the future.
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