



# Reciprocate

THE RESPONSIBLE BUSINESS GROUP

## EMPLOYEE VOLUNTEERING

### BEST-PRACTICE HANDBOOK

A step-by-step guide for Oxfordshire employers to support their community by sharing time, talent and skills



# Foreword

Employee volunteering provides significant benefits to businesses and employees, as well as having a significant impact on charities and at the heart of local communities. Some of the professional skills employers and staff might take for granted are priceless to charities and community organisations – according to the NCVO almanac, the value of volunteering is estimated at £22.6bn per year.

In the current competitive market to attract, retain and develop quality staff, employers need to meet the high expectations of both potential and existing employees. They expect their workplace to provide purposeful opportunities and other engaging activities, such as volunteering. Customers too are becoming more demanding and discerning, wanting to buy from organisations that demonstrate deep and authentic engagement in local communities. This selective approach also extends to suppliers and investors.



However, when businesses do see the potential and attempt to engage, take-up is often very low and sometimes, poor experiences inhibit further engagement. So we have produced this guide to help businesses understand the benefits and opportunities they have, and to help ensure you stand the best possible chance of success. It draws on the experience of helping a range of companies set up bespoke employee volunteering initiatives, along with that of a company that has developed its own successful employee volunteering programme.

Volunteering can take a range of forms, from one-off and brief interactions to more regular activities. These activities can be simple and task-based, or can access high-level skills and expertise. Host organisations and beneficiaries are not limited to charities, but can include clubs, schools, individuals or councils.

We hope this provides the inspiration and guidance you need to either get engaged, or support and enhance your current activities.

**Grant Hayward** (Director, Collaborent) and **Miranda Markham** (Community Relations Director, Bicester Village)

## ABOUT COLLABORENT

Director and founder of Collaborent, Grant Hayward, set up the company after a 30 year career in the corporate world. Seeking a more purposeful work life, Grant took a significant change in direction and began working in the voluntary sector. His steep learning curve gave him a deep understanding of local social and environmental issues, and of the challenges faced by the charitable organisations trying to address them.

During this time he set up an employee volunteering initiative in Oxfordshire supporting employers to engage staff and create structured programmes. He has worked with employers of all sizes, including Cadbury, BT and Amey. Through his voluntary roles and his business, Grant works to develop mutually beneficial cross-sector collaborations.

[www.collaborent.co.uk](http://www.collaborent.co.uk)

## ABOUT BICESTER VILLAGE

Bicester Village is a luxury retail destination home to more than 160 boutiques of world-famous brands, each offering exceptional value with savings of up to 60% on the recommended retail price all year round.

Bicester Village recognises the importance of taking a proactive approach to social responsibility and environmental management, endeavouring to be at the forefront of this area of management within the shopping tourism sector.

The company engages with the local community via various initiatives, such as offering mentoring opportunities to the young, raising funds for children's charities and for the disabled, and volunteering as reading assistants or in local food banks.

[www.bicestervillage.com](http://www.bicestervillage.com)

# Introduction

This handbook is designed help businesses of all sizes with staff to either make a start with employee volunteering, or to develop their existing programmes and ensure they remain successful.

It isn't a comprehensive and detailed manual, but will provide the support you need to make substantial progress towards beneficial employee volunteering that can make significant local impact. It includes real examples and case studies from other local businesses, as well as links to further useful information and resources. In putting it together we have drawn on our own experiences, but also on best practice developed by other volunteering organisations across the UK, and locally by Oxfordshire Community and Voluntary Action (OCVA).

## What is employee volunteering?

The National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) describes employee volunteering as “providing employees the opportunity to volunteer with support from their employer, whether this is in the form of time off for individual volunteering or in a programme developed by the employer such as a team challenge event or ongoing arrangement with a community partner.” It is also referred to in other terms, such as Employer Supported (or Sponsored) Volunteering (ESV).



“I see employee volunteering as a mutually beneficial activity – one that supports the charitable sector, but also brings significant benefits to businesses in developing the leadership and professional skills of their staff. I see this personal and career development aspect as a crucial way for Beard to remain a local leader, and would encourage other businesses to adopt the same approach.”

**Mark Beard**, Chairman, Beard Construction and Vice President of the Chartered Institute of Building.

## Contents

Benefits	4	A focus on trusteeships and board membership	7
Case study: Bicester Village	4	Case study: Homeless Oxfordshire	7
Challenges	5	Step-by-step guide	8
Types of volunteering	6	Other considerations	10
Methods of volunteering	6	Resources and links	11

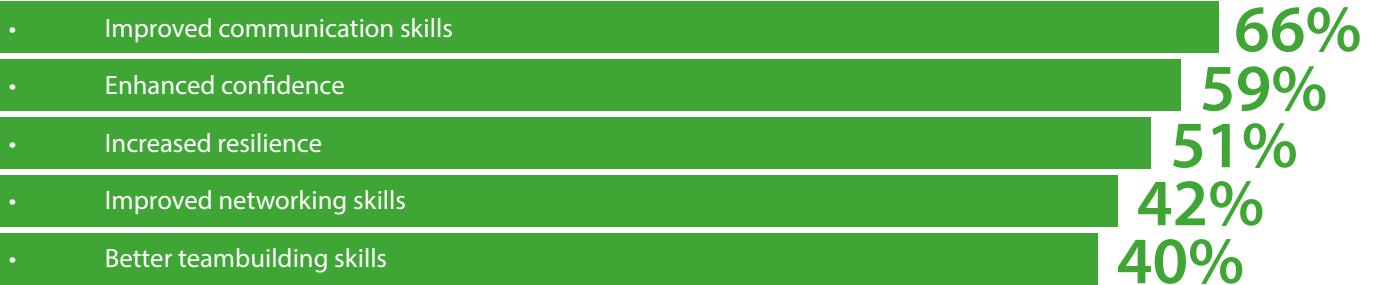


# Benefits

## THE BUSINESS CASE

Employees that are more likely to work for an employer that encourages and promotes volunteering **65%**

Employee competency development after volunteering:



Employee engagement after volunteering:



Sources: **Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, Accenture**

## MUTUAL BENEFIT

Although the business case for employee volunteering is strong, benefits are shared among the employers, employees, the organisation receiving the support, and the wider community and/or environment. In particular, volunteering where employees share their professional skills can have a transformative effect on charities, transferring valuable skills and experience gained in the private sector to the charitable sector, where typically budget constraints mean that many organisations do not have the resources to access professional expertise. Ultimately, this has a longer-term positive impact on the causes that charities aim to tackle, and contributes to a better, shared society.

## CASE STUDY: BICESTER VILLAGE

Bicester Village introduced a structured volunteering programme in 2013, starting with a 'speed-dating' event, where ten different charities tackling a variety of causes were invited to meet the company's staff. All of the charities were Oxfordshire-based, which resonated with the company's aspiration to give back to the community in which they are located. A local focus would also make it easier for employees to take time out of their day to volunteer.



The event was the first step in engaging employees and starting a conversation with the charities – but it wasn't the end. Staff are given paid time off to volunteer, and since the speed-dating event have used their skills to mentor young people, assist the work of the local food bank, spend time as reading assistants in schools and provide advice on retail, visual design, premises or organisational strategy. This is in addition to the more 'conventional' types of volunteering such as stewarding events and fundraising.

Long-term and meaningful relationships have been built with the charities as a result. Some Bicester Village staff have become charity trustees, further cementing the element of skilled professional support. Through the company's influence locally, the charities have access to connections and practical help that is hugely valuable – and ultimately impacts positively on the local people whose lives are improved by their work.



# Challenges

Establishing and deploying employee volunteering programmes has taught us a lot: to become accustomed to actively seeking greater mutual understanding between businesses and community organisations; to see the full picture of the opportunities; and to adopt a realistic approach.

This is also underpinned by research undertaken by the Universities of Hull and Sheffield, which was used to inform a programme called The Skills Exchange, supported by Collaborent and Oxfordshire Community Foundation. The research identified four key challenges:

- **Skills Gap:** What is being offered by businesses in terms of resources doesn't always match what is needed by the host organisation.
- **Capacity Gap:** Host organisations often struggle with the resources needed to manage and support employee volunteers, eg with training or supervision.
- **Knowledge Gap:** A lack of understanding between businesses and charities, as well an absence of appreciation of each other in terms of culture, language, or requirements.
- **Infrastructure Gap:** The need for some form of independent brokerage to facilitate and support engagement.

One common example of these gaps is the company volunteering day. This is a very popular form of volunteering, and can be undertaken on an individual basis, but often in groups, which helps to develop skills and teams, and can make a big impact in one day. These can be very rewarding for employees – but for the charities, it can be difficult to match and find appropriate tasks, or to supply staff that are sufficiently experienced and resourced to host a group like this. There are other ways to mobilise a group of employee volunteers on a short-term project, perhaps by challenging them to tackle a particular organisational issue identified by the charity. For this to work, the lines of communication must be open.

The step-by-step summary guide that follows will help you to gain a better understanding of these challenges and be best prepared to avoid the problems that can be caused by these gaps.

“It's very difficult to do something meaningful for the community and for staff if you just think of volunteering as a one-off, group activity. We prefer to match staff with opportunities that fit with their passions, and enable them to support charities over the longer term.”

**Miranda Markham**, Community Relations Director, Bicester Village



# Types of volunteering

Many people who volunteer don't actually realise they are doing so and simply think of themselves as just "helping out". Equally, beneficiaries can be wide-ranging, from individuals like neighbours or mentees to organisations such as charities, clubs, schools, hospitals, councils and committees.

## SKILLS SHARE

- Sharing valuable professional skills and services like marketing, social media, HR, IT, law and accountancy
- Mentoring charity staff – being at the end of a phone or offering drop-in lunches or troubleshooting sessions
- Carrying out one-off projects or research
- Pro-bono services or 'loan'/secondment of an employee to small local groups, schools and charities
- Using employees' spare time skills and hobbies, eg arts and crafts or DIY

## GOVERNANCE

- Trusteeships
- Committee memberships, advisory boards and steering groups
- School governor, NHS trustee or Official Prison Visitor

## BEFRIENDING AND MENTORING

- Visits or phone calls to elderly or isolated people
- Support for school students (CV writing, mock interviews, reading, English as a second language)
- Experiential visits to workplaces
- Speaking at conferences, seminars, meetings or 'human libraries'

- Mentoring support or social contact for disadvantaged people eg ex-offenders, homeless people, people with learning disabilities, children in care

## FUNDRAISING

- Charity of the Year – one-off sales, competitions, events or sponsored challenges
- Collaborations with sector competitors, clients and suppliers

## TASK/TEAMBUILDING

- Manual labour for community organisations that need this
- Microvolunteering such as city spring cleans or event stewarding
- Skills share days by functional team
- Carrying out a strategic review and making recommendations

# Methods of volunteering

Increasingly, new and creative ways to volunteer are being developed that enable far more flexibility. Take into account:

- **Numbers:** staff can volunteer as individuals, as a work group or as a wider collective from across an area
- **Location:** this can be on site (eg at the charity's premises or in the community), remotely (eg from a desk or phone at home or at work), or as a 'reverse host' (inviting charities to visit your workplace)
- **Frequency:** people can volunteer regularly, flexibly or as a one-off
- **Timing:** if you have an allotted number of hours or days, staff could spend them in one go, or split them over a period of time.

Being open-minded about what constitutes volunteering, and where and how you could do this, will help you increase your impact.



"Volunteering as a trustee has been a great opportunity to apply some of the skills I've learned in my workplace – and add to them. One of the big lessons has been how simple things can be when you're working with a smaller organisation and focused purely on the outcome that you want, without the bureaucracy and politics of a more corporate environment. It's a more simple, straightforward approach to getting things done."

**Neil Preddy**, Senior VP Client Service, Nielsen

# A focus on trusteeships and board membership

Reciprocate encourages members to engage with and support all forms of volunteering, many of which are referred to in this guide. However, we believe that the type of volunteering that provides the biggest impact on charities, and the most satisfying experience for employees, is board-level volunteering: that is, leveraging the skills and experience of employees to become trustees and advisory panellists on charity boards, school governing bodies, local councils and other types of committee.

Not only does this strengthen the recipient organisations and support local communities, but it also provides excellent careers and skill development opportunities for staff in return. The experience gained can boost their career trajectory, making it an important element in HR departments' career development planning, especially for high-potential employees.

"Employee volunteering (and in particular board-level volunteering) is a great way for employees to develop their skills, as well as enabling them to make a significant contribution to their local communities – and have fun at the same time!"

**Diana Breeze**, Group Human Resources Director, Landsec



## CASE STUDY: HOMELESS OXFORDSHIRE

This leading homelessness charity decided it was time for a strategic change in order to absorb cuts in government funding, develop public engagement and boost its fundraising function.



The charity's board has been reinvigorated with the help of trustees from leading local professional services firms. Graham Beith, Branch Manager at Handelsbanken, and William Downing, a Partner at Blake Morgan, have helped Homeless Oxfordshire transform the way it is organised and financially managed, leading the charity to actively embrace the opportunities provided by becoming less reliant on statutory funding.

William comments: "I felt that becoming a trustee, and now a Board Chair, was something I really must do for my own professional development. As a lawyer I have detailed training in how to apply the law, but as my career has progressed I have become increasingly required to be a strong manager and strategic thinker. Being on a board has trained me in how different people behave and interact, how to manage meetings and communicate, and how to build networks. It has helped me think creatively and commercially, and empowered me with the confidence to take these skills back into my workplace."

Graham felt supported in taking on a community role by the culture and values of Swedish company Handelsbanken. "My involvement has really broadened my outlook – seeing how the community copes with rough sleepers, particularly in very cold weather, for example, and gaining an understanding of the mechanisms to support those in a moment of distress

or need and society's most vulnerable. It's a huge eye-opener onto a completely different world and makes me aware of the real and pressing need, right on my doorstep – all a long way removed from the usual day job!"



# Step-by-step guide

## 1. Do the groundwork

First consider what you are seeking to achieve in the longer term, and importantly, how it fits with the broader activity of the business, especially alongside your other CSR strategies. Especially relevant for larger businesses, there are sometimes different activities and relationships in various areas of the organisation; reviewing and aggregating these will be useful to inform a clear approach for the whole organisation.

## 2. Articulate your approach

Consider capturing your objectives and method in written guidelines. It's a great opportunity for the company to demonstrate a firm commitment, and can also help to ensure middle management are supportive of staff who are keen to get involved. You might wish to include within these objectives the number of employees taking up the opportunity and the overall number of hours of support provided. Try to balance setting a clear policy and process, and minimising bureaucracy.

## 3. Engage and inspire

It's vital to secure buy-in at all levels, especially at board level – and support from the Chair or Chief Executive can make all the difference. However, in order to ensure deep and wide engagement, involving and empowering staff to help drive and steer the initiative is essential. Some companies form staff committees to achieve this, and it's highly recommended to seek and appoint 'champions' to support and promote the programme. Be realistic in terms of resources required – by implication there is a cost involved, but executed effectively the return on investment should be significant.

## 4. Seek help and advice

Brokerage organisations can save you time, help find appropriate opportunities and provide vital expertise and resources – if you are willing to pay for them. There are also experienced and well-connected people and organisations in the Reciprocate network and wider business community who can help you – mobilise your networks and ask as many people and organisations 'in the know' to help connect you with the community organisations that match your interests.

## 5. Build momentum

Consider ways in which you can recruit volunteers internally. It's highly likely you have plenty of staff who already volunteer who would be prepared to act as advocates and promote the benefits they reap from undertaking these roles. Equally, you also need to be aware that some may well wish to keep their private lives private. Reciprocate has run a number of interactive workshops for members to highlight the benefits and wide variety of opportunities and causes that staff may not be aware of. There is a modest cost, but these can help engage and inspire employee engagement.

**Attendees at a Reciprocate employee volunteering workshop run for scottfraser rated the session an average of 9.9 out of 10**

## 6. Make it happen

Having identified the sorts of causes and organisations you and your staff would like to support, and secured sound external engagement, employee volunteering opportunities can then be developed (or promoted if they already exist). These opportunities have to be genuinely mutually beneficial, to both your company and staff, and to the community organisations you want to be involved with. Most organisations you support will ensure correct legal and insurance compliance is adhered to, but do check that these are in place. You might then wish to publicise the chance to volunteer widely internally or externally, or have a 'soft launch' to test the water.

## 7. Keep the ball rolling

Experience at Bicester Village shows that starting with a mass volunteering effort can lead to deeper and longer-term partnerships with charity and community bodies. Implementing a methodically organised programme could be the first step to engaging the whole company, and building relationships in an organic way, where some staff may subsequently become trustees and mentors.

## 8. Shout about it!

Keep staff informed of opportunities and updated with stories of successful activities, including recognising and celebrating the achievement of those individuals involved in volunteering. Collect photographs, videos and testimonials, remembering to seek and secure permissions – and be aware that in certain situations it won't be possible for reasons of beneficiary confidentiality. Use your own PR process and strong relationships with press and media externally to let customers and partners know what you are doing.

**Hot tip: Press and media are often cynical about businesses trying to promote these types of activities, so the story is far more compelling when shared by the recipient organisation expressing the value of the support they received.**

## 9. Monitor and evaluate

There are lots of reasons to monitor, measure, evaluate and report on your activities and impact. Again, the line needs to be drawn between capturing sufficient information and making best use of it, without creating a burdensome, bureaucratic process. Reasons to do this include having robust data that can demonstrate your impact and the difference you make, and also monitoring your own performance and informing areas for improvement. Benchmarking can help with this too, as well as measuring the monetary value of your support.



# Other considerations

## Cost

Employee volunteering does come at a cost and it brings other demands upon the business. A realistic view needs to be taken of this, but these should be more than offset by the positive impact within the business and local community if managed well. This will include internal costs, which can often be hidden, such as time out of the business, as well as expenses such as travel. Bear in mind that employee volunteering can be just as disruptive to host organisations, and cost them time and money to organise and manage. Some organisations therefore charge, or request support for things like materials and equipment.

## Brokerage

Online resources continue to improve, so some employers and employees choose to seek and arrange their own volunteering opportunities. Websites like [oxonvolunteers.org](http://oxonvolunteers.org) can help with this. As referred to elsewhere, accessing additional support and expertise could significantly enhance and maximise the impact of employee volunteering programmes. Many businesses take the view that a member of staff can simply contact some local organisations to find opportunities, and may not appreciate the value brought by experts who have a sound understanding across sectors.

## Sharing resources and in-kind contributions

To complement the provision of personnel support, consideration should be given of other support that could be provided in the form of resources such as equipment, workspace and other facilities. This could include offering a limited number of places to charities and other organisations on company-funded training programmes, for example.



## Scheduling and coordinating activity

Many businesses create a calendar of events, which are aligned to nationally promoted days and events, such as the annual Trustees Week celebration, which tends to take place every November. This helps with resource management and PR.

## Collaborating with others

To really maximise your impact in the community and within your business, you might want to consider developing powerful collaborations with others. Creating joint programmes or initiatives within your supply chains can deliver incredible results. So consider encouraging customers and suppliers to join you in your activities, or even instigate some friendly competition with other businesses in your sector.



# Resources and links

## OXFORDSHIRE COMMUNITY AND VOLUNTARY ACTION (OCVA)

OCVA is the leading support body for the Oxfordshire voluntary and community sector. They provide local charities and community groups with advice, training programmes, advocacy and development opportunities. From a business point of view, they are a great starting point for arranging volunteering opportunities in the county.

[www.ocva.org.uk](http://www.ocva.org.uk)

## OXFORDSHIRE VOLUNTEERS

Oxfordshire Volunteers is the county's central volunteering brokerage website, and brings together volunteering opportunities from OCVA, Volunteer Link-Up and Volunteer Connect. On it you can find volunteering adverts posted by many of the county's 4,000 charities and community groups, from regular commitments to one-off events. This is the ideal place to send your staff if they are expected to arrange their own volunteering opportunities to make the most of a company-sponsored day off for volunteering.

[www.oxonvolunteers.org](http://www.oxonvolunteers.org)

## OXFORD HUB

Oxford Hub is a centre for social change, mobilising residents through social action and innovation in order to make Oxford a better city for everyone in it. Their Young Trustees Programme connects early career professionals with charities looking to welcome a young trustee onto their board. Included is a training and development programme that equips participants with the knowledge and skills to become a visiting trustee and help lead a charity to tackle social and environmental issues.

[www.oxfordhub.org/youngtrustees](http://www.oxfordhub.org/youngtrustees)

## CHARITY MENTORS

Charity Mentors provides leaders of the Oxfordshire not-for-profit sector with pro-bono, high-quality mentoring and support for strategic decision-making. They look for mentors who have run organisations, and who have been responsible for growing them: people who understand the voluntary sector and who have high-level business experience. There is a great deal of flexibility for the mentors, who work on short-term mentoring projects (three to five months) and who arrange the timing of engagements to suit themselves and their mentee.

[www.charitymentors.co.uk](http://www.charitymentors.co.uk)

## OXLEP SKILLS

The Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership's Skills team creates and supports links between business and education across Oxfordshire, to inspire our future workforce. Volunteers from businesses should talk to the team about opportunities to inspire and inform students through activities such as speaking, mentoring or work experience.

[www.oxfordshirelep.com](http://www.oxfordshirelep.com)

The Reciprocate website [www.reciprocateox.org](http://www.reciprocateox.org) has a handy network directory giving links to organisations addressing social problems, building strategic solutions and convening like-minded people together. This is constantly updated and so is the best place to go for up-to-date resources. Filter the directory to see links and connections relating specifically to volunteering.

**This Employee Volunteering Handbook** has been created by Grant Hayward of Collaborent with the help of Miranda Markham from Bicester Village, both members of Reciprocate. The content is supported by leading volunteering support agencies Oxfordshire Community and Voluntary Action, Oxford Hub and Charity Mentors.

Reciprocate is a responsible business group that aims to help Oxfordshire's business community become more strategic in their thinking about community engagement, and realise their good intentions through the power of many. Reciprocate is led by local companies and hosted by Oxfordshire Community Foundation.

### OXFORDSHIRE COMMUNITY FOUNDATION

3 Woodin's Way, Oxford, OX1 1HD  
ocf@oxfordshire.org  
01865 798666  
www.reciprocateox.org



### OXFORDSHIRE COMMUNITY AND VOLUNTARY ACTION (OCVA)

The Old Court House, Floyds Row, Oxford OX1 1SS  
admin@ocva.org.uk  
01865 251946  
www.ocva.org.uk

