



Community investment: Time

Overview

This guidance document introduces the concepts of employee volunteering and is meant for people within organisations involved with sustainability and community relationships. It is a starting point for Sustainable Business Council (SBC) members who are either beginning, redefining or progressing their community investment (CI) and employee volunteering programmes.

Te ao Māori is an inclusive and holistic view held by the indigenous people of Aotearoa New Zealand. Throughout the guide, we aim to encourage you to consider perspectives of local mana whenua as histories, practices and traditions will differ between iwi, hapū and whānau. We recognise these differences and support the application of correct tikanga and kawa within the rohe your organisations operate within.

We acknowledge Te Tiriti o Waitangi/The Treaty of Waitangi as a key guiding document of importance in the context of business in Aotearoa New Zealand, as well as within the context of community investment. Partnership between Māori and the Crown is imperative to the success of both Māori and tangata Tiriti. It is important to acknowledge the complex history of Aotearoa, New Zealand and invite organisations to understand the ongoing mahi required to ensure Te Tiriti o Waitangi is respected and upheld throughout their operations.

While the guide includes te ao Māori views and mātauranga Māori, we highly recommend our members connect with local iwi and hapū to build meaningful relationships and to respectfully include the appropriate tikanga where and when required. The guide will encourage you and your organisation to lean into te ao Māori concepts, and we encourage curiosity and courage in your leadership to do the same.

This document aims to provide practical steps for designing and delivering an employee volunteering programme to create a comprehensive and impactful approach for activating the 'S' in ESG. It does this in a systematic and integrated way and so strengthens its connection to and augmentation of each element.

The guiding principle – Awhina

Whakatauki: “Awhina atu awhina mai”

To give help and receive help

This principle leans into the concept of awhi (help) and tautoko (support). As a very practical and tangible form of CI, employee volunteer programmes often deliver a far greater impact for staff, customers and the community than the more traditional donations and sponsorships.

Many employees spend time volunteering and contributing their time, skills and expertise within their local communities. For example, Māori (and tangata Tiriti who are partners/spouses or close friends of Māori) often spend their free time contributing to their marae (caring for it, sharing it with visitors, using their skillset to support the everyday running of it, being on the trust board etc.) or their whenua (pest control practices, māra kai [gardens], restoration projects etc.).

Many people, including Māori, consider volunteering to be a valuable part of life and are enriched by the privilege it is to have a connection with their communities and marae and to be able to manaaki (care for) it. It may be worth considering offering Māori staff members support to participate in events and activities at their marae, which could include volunteer days or providing a special type of leave. Consider formalising this support, such as providing Māori with cultural leave for staff.



Key characteristics of a successful employee volunteering programme

Successful employee volunteering programs have three characteristics:

- Addressing community needs
- Reflecting employee interests and skills
- Meeting business priorities.



Benefits of employee volunteering

Benefits to the community

Some of the problems and opportunities facing our communities today cannot be resolved or resourced by traditional government or community sector channels alone. The skills and resources of private and public sector employers and their employees are becoming a vital component in broader programmes to create healthier communities and economies. Business, and increasingly public sector employee volunteers, can work in partnerships to improve social and economic outcomes in areas such as education, health, crime and regeneration.

Across Aotearoa New Zealand, Māori groups (iwi, hapū, whanau and Māori organisations for example) are willing to partner with corporate organisations to provide support services or work on environmental regeneration projects. Developing meaningful relationships with Māori groups through volunteering is an effective way to maintain connection to mana whenua, to expose employees to te Ao Māori and to be a better Tiriti/Treaty partner in general.

Employee volunteers with professional skills can, for example:

- Produce business plans for voluntary organisations
- Create long-term funding and financial strategies
- Help charities to set up trading arms and social enterprise
- Provide pro bono professional guidance and advice
- Extend their skillsets and comfort zones by working with groups to provide services (cleaning, planting etc.) at local marae and sites of significance to mana whenua.

Employee volunteers can also:

- Provide a new and fresh perspective for community organisations
- Lay the groundwork for longer term partnerships between companies and the voluntary sector
- Increase the awareness of community issues amongst their colleagues and the general public.

Benefits to the employee

Community involvement offers a whole range of benefits to employees, such as:

- A chance to develop personal skills such as time management, communication and presentation skills
- An opportunity to work in a completely new environment and develop transferable skills
- The opportunity to meet and work with people from other departments
- An extra dimension to life by providing new experiences outside the usual work and social environment
- The opportunity to contribute to an issue that they really care about
- The opportunity to build relationships with diverse groups of people.

Benefits to the company

Employee volunteers positively affect the company's relationship with its stakeholders and the community in which it operates. Employee volunteering can positively affect a company's:

- Licence to operate
- Change management and innovation
- Recruitment and staff retention
- Staff morale and work performance
- Training and development
- Ability to build relationships with diverse groups of people.



Licence to operate

Employee volunteering as part of a wider corporate community involvement program can improve the company's image and engagement with the communities in which it operates. By making strong links with the local community the company demonstrates that it takes its corporate citizenship and social responsibility very seriously.

A key responsibility of organisations being a good Tiriti/Treaty partner is to consider their obligations under Te Tiriti o Waitangi.

A strategic tool for change management and innovation

Involvement in the community can give businesses access to networks and alliances that help them to keep in touch with the complex and rapidly changing world. It can enhance networking with other companies and help forge new relationships, as well as generate powerful alliances capable of tackling community issues.

Employee volunteering can:

- Aid management of change by providing a fresh perspective and encouraging new ways of thinking
- Help foster interdepartmental cohesion within an organisation by creating a shared sense of purpose and loyalty
- Provide staff with new insights and knowledge that encourage innovation both in the community and within the company.

Recruitment and staff retention

There is clear evidence that people make the link between companies that are actively involved in the community and those that are good to work for. Employee involvement is important to recruitment and staff retention because potential recruits are increasingly searching for employers of choice - organisations that they want to work for whose ethos they can relate to and contribute towards.

CASE STUDY



Z Energy team members supporting with the Puhinui Regeneration project.

Z Energy – Empowering our Z whānau to connect with what matters most in their community

Giving back doesn't always mean giving money. Z Energy (Z) believes it's important their staff are empowered to connect with and support their local communities. That's why they give staff two days of paid leave each year to volunteer for something that matters to them.

Z has offered annual volunteering leave for quite a while now and is seeing more and more staff take advantage of it each year. They set themselves a goal in 2024 to lift the uptake of volunteer leave to at least 30%, with a stretch goal of 40%. By the end of October, they've managed to already achieve 36% uptake and are trending beyond the stretch goal of 40% by year end. The offer of volunteering leave on its own doesn't deliver behaviour change. The uplift was achieved through visible leadership, active promotion of diverse opportunities that resonate with staff and a focus on gratitude.

Z's Head of Community and Sustainability Abbie Bull says: "Contributing to something meaningful in your community can support the interests of charitable organisations and provide some surprising health benefits at the same time. So that 'warm glow' you feel after giving back to something worthy, might actually be the antidote to your stressful day job."

Find out more about the initiative [here](#).

Staff morale and enhanced work performance

The new skills that employees can develop and the new ideas that they can bring back to the workplace have been proven to enhance creativity and performance in their jobs. Many companies find that CI gives employees the power to make a difference to issues they care about, sending a clear message that the business cares about its employees.

Employees appreciate the support employers give to their volunteering efforts. Support can be financial or in-kind for voluntary work done in an employee's own time or the opportunity to get involved during work hours. Employers increasingly communicate employee volunteering alongside other benefits such as pensions and health insurance.

Employees already personally involved or with existing knowledge of a company's community investment activities are significantly more likely to feel pride about their workplace, and this is shown to have an impact on motivation, skills development, teamwork and likelihood of staying with the company. Advocacy of the organisation has also been shown to increase among those employees involved in community activities with the company. Please refer to [BITC](#) for further information.

Training and development

Employee volunteering can complement existing training and development programmes with the added dimension of a real-life situation which traditional courses cannot provide. In an unfamiliar situation, employees can be stimulated into creative thinking and problem-solving, and encouraged into real learning.

Research conducted by the [Conference Board](#), based on interviews with executives, highlighted that the below skills can be enhanced through employee volunteering:

- Communication
- Organisational and time management
- People skills such as negotiating and listening
- Accountability and assessment reporting
- Planning
- Budgeting
- Wellbeing skills such as stress management and prioritisation.

In addition to these, it was found that employee volunteering was also useful in changing perspectives and developing attitudinal differences in the following areas:

- Increased empathy for co-workers and respect for diversity
- More innovative approach to responding to difficulties
- Enhancement of calculated risk-taking
- Enhanced sense of community and social obligation
- Heightened appreciation of employment-related benefits
- Affirmation of personal capability and self-worth
- Positive resistance to feelings of isolation and alienation.

It is important to give volunteers the space and support to use any newfound skills and capabilities so they can bring value back into the company.

Conclusion

Employees' skills and time are important resources and crucial components in the community investment toolkit. A strategic approach to community involvement enables an employer to bring the skills and time of their employees to areas of community along with other resources such as donated goods and services, monetary donations and sponsorship, and access to facilities. It also gives the company the opportunity to invite the employees to share and utilise newfound skills in the daily roles.