**Employer-supported volunteering**

* Understand employer-supported volunteering
* Recognise the benefits
* Develop your approach
* Work out your offer
* Write an employer-supported volunteering policy
* Find and share volunteering opportunities with staff
* Encourage staff to take part and celebrate their efforts
* Evaluate your employer-supported volunteering offer

**Understand employer-supported volunteering**

Employer-supported volunteering is when you support your staff to take part in volunteering opportunities, usually during work hours. It’s also sometimes called corporate volunteering.

The volunteering activities can be practical or skills-based. An example of practical volunteering would be helping to package and deliver food parcels with a local food bank. A skills-based volunteering example would be designing a website for a charity.

**Recognise the benefits**

Employer-supported volunteering has benefits for both organisations and staff.

Some common benefits for organisations are:

* improved employee engagement, satisfaction and wellbeing
* professional development opportunities for staff
* team building and stronger workplace relationships
* building relationships with other voluntary, public or private sector organisations and the local community
* meeting your environmental, social and governance responsibility goals.

Some common benefits for staff include:

* enjoyment and increased wellbeing
* feeling that they are making a difference
* meeting new people from different backgrounds
* improved employment prospects, especially for young people.

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**Develop your approach**

**Consider your motivations and impact**

Think about why you want to offer employer-supported volunteering and what impact you want to make. Use this to develop a plan and approach.

For example, if you want to help your local community, you could start by getting in touch with local organisations to find out what support they might need. This could include:

* foodbanks
* charity shops
* community gardens
* art clubs
* libraries
* community centres
* faith groups.

If you want to build relationships with specific organisations, you should contact them early on in your planning process. For example, you may want to speak to organisations that work with young people or on environmental issues. Discuss what sort of volunteering opportunities they may be able to offer your team and what the mutual benefits would be.

If your main focus is on building stronger relationships in your team, then you should think about organising activities that staff can take part in as a group.

Consider whether there are any volunteering activities you’re not willing to support via employer-supported volunteering. These might be activities or organisations that don’t align with your organisation’s mission or values.

**Talk to your staff**

Talk to your staff before starting your employer-supported volunteering offer. You should find out:

* if they’re interested in employer-supported volunteering
* if there are any roles or opportunities they’re particularly interested in
* if there are any organisations or causes which they are particularly passionate about, or if they have any existing contacts within the voluntary sector who you could partner with
* what support they need to take part. For example, you may need to address workloads if staff say they’d struggle to find time to volunteer.

Talk to your staff in one-to-one conversations and team meetings. You could also carry out a survey to gather opinions.

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**Work out your offer**

There are some practical things to consider when starting an employer-supported volunteering offer.

**Paid time off for volunteering**

Offering paid time off for volunteering can encourage people to volunteer. For example, it allows staff to take part in opportunities that clash with work hours. It also means staff won’t lose money if they decide to take time off work to volunteer.

You can also give staff the option to claim back paid time off for volunteering they do outside of working hours, for example in the evening or at weekends. This allows staff to organise volunteering around other commitments, such as childcare. It also gives them time to rest and supports their wellbeing.

**Organising volunteering opportunities**

Volunteering can be arranged by your organisation or by staff members themselves. You can also seek external help, for example from a council for voluntary services (CVS), which is Voluntary Community Ation East Cambs or VCAEC for short.

Organising the volunteering opportunities yourself and offering them to staff can be a good option if your organisation works with a specific voluntary sector partner.

You should decide if you want to see evidence of volunteering opportunities arranged by staff. For example, a confirmation email from the organisation they’ll be volunteering with. Remember it may be harder for staff to provide evidence for informal volunteering.

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**Write an employer-supported volunteering policy**

Your employer-supported volunteering policy should help clarify the expectations between your organisation and staff who decide to volunteer.

The policy should include:

* a definition of volunteering
* if there are any volunteering opportunities you’re not willing to support staff to take part in
* whether you’ll offer paid time off for volunteering and if so, how much. Most organisations offer between three to five days
* how to request volunteering leave and who’s responsible for approving it. Explain how decisions are made and when requests can be turned down
* information on where to find volunteering opportunities, or how to sign up for the ones offered by your organisation
* the difference between the role of an employee and the role of a volunteer
* any expectations of how staff should behave while taking part in volunteering
* what to do if staff have complaints about their volunteering experience or the organisation they’re volunteering with.

**Find and share volunteering opportunities with staff**

Help staff find volunteering opportunities by contacting local organisations such as community centres, faith groups and councils for voluntary services.

Share information with staff on where to find volunteering opportunities.

Staff will have a variety of different skills and interests. Make sure you're offering and sharing a wide range of opportunities.

Consider whether the opportunities you’re offering are accessible and inclusive. For example, do volunteering hours clash with childcare responsibilities? If the role involves physical activity, can it be made accessible to people with limited mobility? Make sure your opportunities cater to different needs.

You can also ask staff to share volunteering opportunities that they come across.

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**Encourage staff to take part and celebrate their efforts**

Regularly remind staff of volunteering opportunities and the benefits of volunteering. Use internal communications channels, including emails, one-to-ones and team meetings.

Recognise and celebrate volunteers.

* Give people shout-outs on your internal communications channels or your organisation’s social media.
* Ask staff to share their volunteering stories, quotes and photos. Remember not all volunteering activities will be suitable for this type of sharing. Let staff choose whether they want to take part.
* Give out certificates of recognition to those who have volunteered a certain number of hours, or who demonstrate the impact they’ve made.

**Evaluate your employer-supported volunteering offer**

* Gather feedback from your voluntary sector partners and staff to see how your offer is working.
* Check in with your corporate and voluntary partners to see how the partnership is going. See if there are any issues to address or opportunities to develop further collaboration.
* Use one-to-ones, meetings and staff surveys to check in on how your offer is working for staff.
* Make changes based on the feedback you get from staff and partners.