

## Release Time Programs

Release time is defined as paid time off for volunteering and community service.

### Advantages

- Employees see release time as a benefit or 'perk' which improves employee morale, retention and recruitment.
- Active, engaged employees are happier, more professional and more productive.
- Allows employees to volunteer with opportunities that they wouldn't otherwise be able to do such as with their children's school.
- Promotes the company as a 'good neighbor' in the community.
- Typically, union employees are included in the release time program, which bridges the gap between union and management.
- Brings positive outcomes for the company including employee development opportunities, leadership building, team building, and increased employee morale.

### Disadvantages

- Requires careful administration and paperwork to avoid misuse of program.
- Can only release a few volunteers at a time.
- Can conflict with policies for employees whom are not union members.
- Takes away from the workday.
- Lack of management support. Some managers may not support or 'permit' release time in their departments.
- Cost of administration for the program.
- May prove challenging in including production employees as disruptions in production may occur.

Given the characteristics of the specific workplace, amounts of release time may vary. It can be stated in terms of hours/per year or per month.

Some employers choose to allow for flextime instead of release time if they cannot justify the loss of employee hours. In that case, employees are allowed to ask for time off during the workday to volunteer, but are required to make up the hours within the week or pay period.

### A Few Sample Policies:

- **Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota** operates a volunteer paid time off policy in conjunction with its employee volunteer program, Heart of Blue. Employees with at least six months of service have access to 20 hours of paid time off for volunteer service, provided the organization and activity adheres to company guidelines.
- **Hasbro** operates a volunteer paid time off policy in conjunction with its employee volunteer program, Team Hasbro. Employees have access to 48 hours of paid time off per year/four hours per month.

- **The Goldman Sachs Group, Inc.** operates a volunteer paid time off policy giving employees access to eight hours of paid time off per year.
- **Old National Bank** operates a volunteer paid time off policy in conjunction with its employee volunteer program, ONE Community. Employees have access to 24 standard hours plus additional time for disaster relief and special events.
- At **Timberland**, employee civic engagement is encouraged and supported at all levels. Timberland gives an explicit quota of annual work time of 32 hours that their employees may use in service engagement. Employees who intend to use release time should notify their supervisors in advance. Supervisors decide whether to accept or deny the employee's request. Each employee must report the service hours and complete a survey form. No advance notice is required prior to service during company-sponsored events, such as the two annual global days of service (Earth Day and Serv-a-palooza).

### **Request for survey data about release time programs:**

In terms of data, there is not a single national statistic, but there have been informal surveys by Points of Light and other organizations that give a sense of the utilization of release time policies.

Based on 2010 Points of Light Corporate Engagement Awards of Excellence applicants, 76 percent of companies have release time for at least some of their employees, nearly a 16 percent increase since 2007. Excellent EVPs implement a variety of time release policies, depending on the company's nature and strategic approach around employee volunteerism.

In 2009, Boston College found that impact of release time is complex. On one hand, several companies have experienced an increase in volunteer participation after introducing a release time policy, but others have not. They did find, however, that release time for volunteering can be a powerful method for channeling employee volunteering to company focus areas. Cited from the Drivers of Effectiveness for Employee Volunteering and Giving Programs – 2009.

Indeed, according to the Committee Encouraging Corporate Philanthropy's Giving Number 2011 Edition Report, paid release time programs rank as the second most successful domestic and international program around employee volunteerism. In 2010, the median percentage of employees that volunteered at least one hour throughout the year on company time was 25 percent, yet some companies are still lenient in promoting employee volunteerism on company hours. Fifty-two percent of companies offered outside company time volunteer programs which occur outside the normal work schedule, so the employer incurs no compensation costs.

In spite of the popularity of release time use in workplaces between 2008 and 2009, due to the economic downturn, the number of companies offering such programs remained at 69 percent from 2009 to 2010.

Many companies don't differentiate their release time policies for their exempt and non-exempt employee volunteers. Even after reviewing some of our retail and manufacturing companies,

those that “do” have a volunteer policy (Timberland for example) utilize the same policy for both exempt and nonexempt. Both UPS and Macy’s employ a large number of non exempt and hourly employees and don’t have a release time policy at all. Employees volunteer on their own time and aren’t compensated for it.

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The [Points of Light Corporate Institute](#) is the go-to resource for community-minded companies looking to build and expand effective employee volunteer programs. With our global network of 250 affiliates and a team of experts, we can help you create a customized volunteer program, engage your employees, learn best practices, network with other leading companies, and gain visibility for leadership and excellence.

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*Note: This information is provided by the Points of Light and is for knowledge-sharing purposes only. This is not a comprehensive list of all companies with employee volunteer programs. We encourage due diligence and proper attribution by those using this resource.*



At Kaiser Permanente, nonexempt employees accrue part-time off at different rates, depending on how long they have been with the company. For purposes of community service, each region sets its own policy on part-time off (e.g. one day per quarter/year, etc.)

At Altria, nonexempt and exempt employees receive eight hours to volunteer for a company sponsored event. Hourly employees can only receive volunteer time with management approval.