Points of Light Corporate Engagement Award of Excellence finalists constitute, by definition, a benchmark of excellence in Employee Volunteer Programs (EVPs). This report analyzes these exalted EVPs to identify the promising and untraditional practices they've pioneered. For information about common practices of recognized EVPs, please see the 2011 Points of Light publication Trends of Excellence in Employee Volunteering Volumes 1-4.

An EVP is defined as a planned, managed effort that seeks to motivate and enable employees to effectively volunteer under the leadership of the employer. For convenience, this report refers to the 2011 Points of Light Corporate Engagement Award of Excellence finalist EVPs as “Excellent EVPs.”

Excellent EVPs described in this series consist of the 12 finalist programs selected from a field of 29 submissions to the 2011 Corporate Engagement Award of Excellence. These Excellent EVPs represent a diverse set of businesses (for a complete list see the back cover) comprised of:

- More than half a dozen industries including financial services, health, and technology
- International (76 percent) as well as U.S. (24 percent) businesses
- A range of sizes from fewer than 2,000 employees to more than 250,000
- Business-to-consumer (B2C) companies (54 percent) as well as business-to-business (B2B) companies (46 percent)

**Key Innovative Practices**

The economic crisis of the past five years has led to some of the most creative and innovative thinking amongst corporations. At a time when companies are doing more with less, they’ve found innovative ways to engage employees and support communities that have proven successful. Today, these practices are seen not only as a way to get through difficult economic times, but have emerged as new innovative models of employee and community engagement.

The following are some of the key innovative practices displayed by Excellent EVPs.
Make Service a Celebration

If Excellent EVPs are harbingers of the future, employee volunteering will replace oversized cakes and champagne as the preferred method for celebrating corporate achievements.

- For example, IBM’s 100th anniversary was centered in service to address societal issues. It included Service Jam, a global three-day online dialogue focused on solutions to long-standing societal challenges that helped inform the actual service performed by IBM employees during the celebration year. The Centennial Celebration of Service, a year-long effort that resulted in more than 3.2 million volunteer hours, was focused around a mass action day of service held on June 15, the day before the actual anniversary, involving hundreds of thousands of employees volunteering around the world. As part of the centennial celebration, IBM released activity kits to the public. The kits highlighted their volunteers’ most successful activities in several languages.

- Similarly, Cisco’s Chairman and CEO, John Chambers, asked employees to mark Cisco’s 25th anniversary by volunteering at least four hours each (200,000 total). Employees responded by surpassing the goal by 15 percent.

Customize Policies

Encouraging volunteering across the board is good, but encouraging targeted, well-selected volunteering can take an EVP from good to great.

- For example, rather than simply offering grants to nonprofits where employees volunteer, McKesson has several grant programs to encourage volunteering activities that draw on company skills and to achieve higher impact. These include:
  - MVP Board of Directors Grants which donate $500 to organizations where employees on the board of directors.
  - Departmental Team Building Service Grants which donate up to $2,500 to organizations where five or more employees conduct an external team building service project.
  - Conference Team Building Service Grants which donate $10,000 to support organizations that benefit from a team building service project involving at least 500 employees at a McKesson conference.

- Similarly, PwC’s Project Make [it] count program awards $450 grants to support the implementation of employee ideas for innovative, small-scale, community-service projects that have a lasting impact. As a result of this program, employees have created an environmental program at a Boston, Mass., high school, taught high school students basic investment concepts in Portland, Ore., and sponsored a career exploration group for middle school girls in Washington, D.C.
Create Niche Causes

Survey findings reveal that EVPs traditionally select cause areas that employees consider important in their personal lives. This approach tends to replicate volunteer opportunities that employees could envision and conduct on their own. It strengthens those charitable areas that the public already favors – most often education, environment, children and health (in the U.S.).

A novel approach guides cause selection based on employee’s personal lives, while also defining nonstandard causes based employees’ workplace experience and company interests. Focusing on nontraditional causes that resonate with the workplace culture and corporate character, what could be called “niche causes” has several advantages over traditional cause selection. Niche causes can build awareness for important societal issues that might be neglected, make it more likely that the company can support the cause with its expertise, lead to increased employee pride and – by having a more direct and deeper connection to their work – enhance the employee workplace experience dramatically while differentiating its community involvement from other companies.

- One of Goldman Sachs Group, Inc.’s signature causes, 10,000 Women, management education to underserved female developing and emerging markets. It's extremely an employee interest survey would uncover this niche top charitable interest of employees. Yet, this cause is choice for several reasons.

  First, employees likely have natural affinity, or even direct connection, to the cause. Not only is female entrepreneurship closely linked to Goldman Sachs’ commercial work, but an investigation conducted by its own investment research division helped establish that investing in women is an effective way to reduce inequality and facilitate inclusive economic growth. The resonance between work and volunteering of this cause will, in turn, augment the HR-related benefits of volunteering such as employee pride, morale and engagement.

  - A second benefit of the female entrepreneurship cause is that it can directly benefit from Goldman Sachs’ expertise in business and management.

  - Third, a niche cause sets Goldman Sachs’s community involvement apart from that of competitors, which typically focus on more standard causes.
Fold Volunteering into the Workplace Experience

Many Excellent EVPs have discovered the benefits of blending at least some volunteer opportunities into the workplace experience, as opposed to offering volunteering and work activities that are distinct and separate. A key advantage of such integration is improved recruitment. Many busy employees find it difficult to set aside volunteer, integrating volunteer activities into the lowers this barrier by reducing the time, distance and energy required to volunteer. This model can serve as a recruitment incentive. Furthermore, as mentioned earlier, the closer connection between work and volunteering likely boosts the HR benefits that accrue from volunteering such as employee workplace pride, morale and engagement.

There are many ways to blur the lines separating volunteering and work.

- JPMorgan Chase volunteers help youngsters improve their reading skills without leaving their desks. Employees tutor students using a virtual tutoring program developed by their nonprofit partner.

- Bank of America asks senior leaders to consider participating in a volunteer event as part of their market visits.

- Constellation Energy embraces volunteering as a part of their “take your daughters and sons to work day” by incorporating a variety of outreach projects for children.

- At McKesson, volunteering and workplace experience are so well integrated that employees don’t have to leave the office to walk for diabetes. McKesson hosts onsite workplace charity walks benefitting diabetes.

Recruit via Business Functions

Engaging employees, with both awareness and participation, in volunteer opportunities is one of the most pervasive and frustrating challenges EVP managers face. While communication from the EVP itself are essential, a worthy innovation involves communicating volunteer opportunities through other business functions. This extends the message to wider audiences, including many who might not be interested in workplace volunteering. Furthermore, linking volunteering to a business function, such as performance reviews or the onboarding process, increases participation.

- One example is how McKesson positions volunteering as a key way to demonstrate the ICARE (Integrity, Customer-first, Accountability, Respect, and Excellence) shared corporate principles on which employees are evaluated every year.

- PwC embeds information about its EVP in its college recruitment presentations. Additionally, new hires are not only introduced to PwC’s EVP, they immediately experience it. Their orientation includes a team-building exercise in which new hires put together a bike that they donate to a local youth group.

- Cbeyond’s EVP enables employees to include volunteer records in their performance reviews as a way to highlight their efforts. It’s easy to see how this communication could reach many more employees than the basic “come volunteer” message.
Involve Non-employee Company Stakeholders

Excellent EVPs are increasing their impact by involving stakeholders beyond employees.

• For example, McKesson, involves clients by organizing service projects, such as building care packages, at its sales conferences. These projects help strengthen employee-client relationships.

• Similarly, the Kraft Foods sales team builds bikes alongside customers.

• Goldman Sachs designed a program specifically for retirees. The Goldman Sachs Alumni Network Veterans Mentoring Initiative, connects recent military veterans with Goldman Sachs retirees for mentoring, career counseling and networking.

Direct Grants to Support Volunteering

Aside from “dollars-for-doers” programs that typically link small grants to any nonprofit where an employee volunteers a minimum number of hours, there is minimal integration of corporate grants and employee volunteering within most companies that have EVPs. Most often the grant and volunteer programs lack synergy.

Excellent EVP’s trend otherwise. Many integrate substantive grants and strategic employee volunteering programs in ways that strengthen both.

• Cbeyond’s matching grants include a company match for employee financial contributions. Cbeyond provides matching contributions to nonprofits where employees hold active volunteer leadership positions.

• Amway doesn’t only have a formal grants program. It also has a program that combines grants with volunteering by directing contributions to the schools and organizations that benefit from signature employee volunteer projects.

• Another example of Excellent EVPs that fuse grants and volunteering is IBM’s $10,000 Centennial Grants, which awarded $900,000 in support of 11 replicable projects that apply IBM’s “smarter planet” strategies to community service efforts. The hallmark of “smarter planet” strategies is the intelligent use of the world’s plentiful data to solve societal issues. In addition, IBM Community Grants, based on IBM employee and retiree volunteer service, are awarded to the schools and nonprofit organizations where IBMers volunteer.
Engage Others in EVP Work
The vast majority of Excellent EVPs use employee committees/councils to perform some of the strategy and execution work, but some EVPs cleverly take such distribution of duties a step further.

- For example, Goldman Sachs’ Employee Initiated Projects (EIP) tool enables any employee to introduce, propose and lead a project with the nonprofit of their choice.

- Constellation Energy equips and supports the company’s Business Resources Groups (BRG) in organizing volunteer opportunities that further their missions. For example, the Women’s Alliance BRG conducted monthly mentoring at a center focused on helping women achieve self-sufficiency.

Offer Microvolunteering
Microvolunteering is a form of volunteering where tasks are completed by a volunteer or a team of volunteers in small increments of time. In almost all cases, microvolunteering tasks are completed online or via an Internet-enabled device, such as a smart phone. More and more, EVPs are offering microvolunteering as an innovative way to engage employees with work limitations and time restraints and to support communities that are further out of reach.

- Kraft Food’s EVP involves employees who can’t commit long-term by offering microvolunteering to aid nonprofits via the Internet, requiring only a few minutes of their time. Employees can assist a clinic in Haiti, select the best logo for a school in Peru or translate a blog entry into Spanish all while riding the train to work, waiting for a meeting or standing in line at the supermarket.

Professionalize the Service
Many Excellent EVPs don’t settle for the notion that any assistance to nonprofits is a good thing. Instead, they aim to maximize the quality of the volunteer contribution through volunteer preparation, training and other support.

- For example, Kraft Food’s Leadership for Performance program offers high potential employees a five-day course in preparation for long-term, skills-based service projects with charity organizations.

- Cisco’s Giving Counselor Program offers an in-house giving counselor to educate, facilitate, encourage and support employees as they tap into their personal charitable goals and interests to make meaningful contributions to their communities. In addition, the company offers nonprofit board service and disaster response training to support the effectiveness of employees performing these services.

- Similarly, JPMorgan Chase’s Volunteer Leaders Development Initiative teaches volunteer leader skills ranging from developing a personal leadership style to improving business presence, skills and visibility in the company through volunteering. JPMorgan Chase also sets high standards for, and supports generously, its Volunteer Groups (VLGs), which are responsible for planning implementing local volunteer events. All VLGs develop and implement annual business plans that define their purpose, membership, communication plan and event project needs. To support the VLGs in meeting this high standard, JPMorgan Chase has created many materials, including a leadership manual and business plan templates.
Position Volunteering as an HR Tool

Many Excellent EVPs position themselves tool for increasing employee engagement, morale, satisfaction, teamwork, retention and skills.

- For example, many Bank of America lines of business use volunteerism for team-building by engaging a workplace team in a one-day home-building, or other form of service blitz, as part of their annual offsite meetings.

- Similarly, BNY Mellon utilizes volunteering to spur employee engagement and teamwork by encouraging employees to create, manage and lead team volunteering projects. During a 2011 assessment of the employee respondents reported high many positive attributes of the program from providing needed support for charities, and skill building to personal enrichment and increased pride in the company.

- Kraft Foods senior leaders and managers view volunteering as a tool to unify teams and build bridges across the organization by including volunteer activities in many of their meetings.

- Cbeyond went one step further presenting employee volunteering as an HR tool by building a mechanism to ensure that it truly worked as an HR tool. The company’s internal university offers a course, “Strategic Professional Development: Taking Your Career to the Next Level through Volunteerism” as a way to help employees jumpstart their own professional growth using volunteering in their professional development plans. The course provides employees step-by-step assistance with developing a performance plan that strengthens their skill-sets through strategic volunteer efforts. Utilizing the plan, they communicate the results of their strategic volunteering to managers during performance reviews.

Conclusions

Although not every innovation is appropriate for every company, EVPs seeking significantly greater participation, effectiveness and societal and business impact might want to consider the following innovations applied by Excellent EVPs:

- Make service a celebration
- Customize policies
- Create niche causes
- Fold volunteering into the workplace experience
- Recruit via business functions
- Involve non-employee company stakeholders
- Direct grants to support volunteering
- Engage others in EVP work
- Offer microvolunteering
- Professionalize the service
- Position volunteering as an HR tool

Many Excellent EVPs integrate corporate grants and employee volunteering in a way that strengthens the impact of both programs.
This report is based on the EVPs recognized as “Excellent EVPs” by virtue of being selected as finalists in the 2011 Points of Light Corporate Engagement Award of Excellence.

Excellent Employee Volunteer Programs

Amway Corporation
Bank of America
BNY Mellon
Cbeyond
Cisco*
Constellation Energy
Cummins Inc.
IBM*
JPMorgan Chase
Kraft Foods
McKesson*
PwC U.S.
The Goldman Sachs Group,

*2011 Points of Light Corporate Engagement of Excellence winners; all others are finalists.

For additional information or for assistance with developing or enhancing your EVP, contact Points of Light Corporate Institute.

Points of Light Corporate Institute enables companies to engage their employees and customers in service to the communities in which they do business. It is the go-to organization providing resources, consulting services and on-the-ground activation to companies around the world seeking innovative, multi-channel engagement in Employee Volunteer Programs (EVP), skills-based volunteering and hands-on service.

Points of Light Corporate Institute
600 Means Street NW, Suite 210
Atlanta, Georgia 30318
Phone: 404.979.2900
Fax: 404.979.2901

Visit www.handsonnetwork.org or www.pointsoflight.org
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.

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 3.0 Unported License. To use or distribute this resource, please attribute publication to the Points of Light Corporate Institute. For more information, please visit www.pointsoflight.org/corporate-institute or contact The Points of Light Corporate Institute at corporateinstitute@pointsoflight.org.