



VOLUNTEER TIME OFF

Implementing and
Optimizing Workplace
Programs and Policies



**POINTS
OF LIGHT**

INTRODUCTION

Employee community engagement programs are widely recognized for providing a variety of benefits to employees, companies and communities. To show a commitment to these programs, many companies offer employees paid time off to participate in volunteer activities during the workday. This benefit, commonly known as Paid Volunteer Time or Volunteer Time Off (VTO), is showing up in different forms across industries, with many companies taking creative approaches that are tailored to their unique workplace structures.

With employees spanning different locations, schedules, responsibilities, skillsets and passions, there is no one-size-fits-all approach to encouraging engagement in volunteer activities. Coupled with a lack of data and insights about building and implementing effective VTO policies, this has resulted in a knowledge gap for many organizations seeking to launch or optimize a VTO program.

This guide provides collective learnings and tools to equip those looking to take the first step, or the next step, toward a successful VTO program or policy. The considerations and tools included are meant to guide you in developing a VTO policy that is best for your organization's unique structure and culture.

Methodology

To inform these insights, Points of Light engaged in conversations with corporate social impact leaders who work for companies in a variety of industries, including consumer goods, energy, financials, healthcare and materials. These companies represent a diverse group of employee types, including those that are salaried, hourly, exempt, nonexempt and unionized, as well as those who are outside of traditional office settings, such as off-site employees or those in manufacturing or call centers.

Defining Volunteer Time Off

For purposes of this guide, "Volunteer Time Off program/policy" or "VTO program/policy" refers to a company-offered initiative for employees to volunteer while being paid by the company, and during hours in which they would otherwise be working.

Note: Volunteer Time Off can sometimes be confused with **Voluntary** Time Off policies. The learnings and considerations in this brief are related only to Volunteer Time Off policies.



Benefits of Encouraging Volunteer Engagement

The benefits observed from employee volunteer programs are wide-ranging. Some key advantages include:

- Positive impacts on nonprofit organizations and the communities they serve
- Improved employee health, happiness and motivation
- Enhanced attraction and retention of talent
- Stronger brand image, trust and customer loyalty

To learn more about the benefits of employee community engagement and the supporting data, review our [Proof Points to Support Investment in Employee Community Engagement](#) brief.

VOLUNTEER TIME OFF BY THE NUMBERS

Companies Offering Volunteer Time Off Programs

Many of the most community-minded companies are focusing on implementing VTO programs.

- **84%** of the [2024 Points of Light Civic 50 honorees](#) offer some type of VTO program.
- CECP's [2023 Giving in Numbers](#) reports that **65%** of companies offered domestic employees VTO opportunities, while **42%** reported offering VTO to international employees.
- **69%** of the [2023 Fortune 100 Best Companies to Work For](#) reported offering paid days off for volunteering.

Deloitte Workplace Volunteer Survey

In Deloitte's [Workplace Volunteer Survey \(2024\)](#), **87%** of respondents said workplace volunteer opportunities are important when considering staying with their current employer or pursuing a work opportunity at a new employer.



**Whether through the same organization or with other organizations within their community.*

VTO as a “Volunteer Enabler”

Goodera's [2024 Corporate Volunteering Quotient Report](#) found a **1.5x** higher workforce participation in companies that leverage “volunteering enablers” compared to companies that don't leverage them. These “volunteer enablers” include Volunteer Time Off, employee resource group networks, volunteer grant programs, a flagship volunteering campaign and/or a volunteering technology platform.



IMPACT FOR NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS

Recognizing that a VTO policy is a valuable lever to enable an increase in overall volunteer participation, implementation can also show an added benefit to the nonprofit sector, since volunteers are a valuable — even essential — resource for many community organizations.

According to the [U.S. Census Bureau and AmeriCorps](#), the percentage of Americans volunteering hit **23%** in 2021, the lowest level since data began being collected in the early 2000s.

“ At Points of Light we believe that volunteering isn’t just something nice to do; it’s necessary. Corporations play a key role in supporting nonprofits delivering community-led solutions. When purpose-driven companies develop policies that enable their employees to serve in the community they increase the number of volunteers, help meet intractable community changes, and build empathy and connection. This is true impact on the individual, community and society level.”

JENNIFER SIRANGELO — PRESIDENT AND CEO, POINTS OF LIGHT

And this support is needed beyond just evenings, weekends, holidays and key cultural moments. Utilizing VTO as a tool to enable volunteerism during a traditional workday allows more flexibility for employees to support organizations during days and times when it’s needed most.

“ The needs our nonprofit partners are addressing — hunger, disconnection, economic needs, youth engagement — are constant. We need people who are willing to volunteer consistently to transform the communities they love.”

ROSIE DRUMGOOLE — CEO, CHICAGO CARES

PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT

Once there’s an established interest in implementing a Volunteer Time Off program, it can feel overwhelming to know where to begin when developing your policy. The following sections serve as a roadmap to ensure the design of your program is done with intentionality, and to guide you to creating a version of VTO that best aligns with your organization.

Note: *These are considerations and are intended to help you reflect on an approach suited to your unique circumstances.*



Phase 1: Strategic Planning

IDENTIFY A PROGRAM GOAL OR GUIDING PRINCIPLE

Before focusing on the details of the policy or program, begin strategic planning by aligning with a goal or guiding principle. Crafting the details of a policy can be complex and having a clear objective can help ensure that all subsequent decisions support a common purpose.

Ask yourself and your team: What are we trying to **enable** by offering a VTO policy?

Some examples may include:

- Enable employees in specific job types, such as those who are off-site or in a manufacturing location, to volunteer (or volunteer more).
- Become an employer of choice and boost recruitment and retention of employees.
- Encourage more diversity in organizations served and types of volunteerism done on behalf of the company.
- Improve employee wellbeing and opportunities for teambuilding, growth and mentorship.
- Encourage employees to follow their personal passions to support communities (rather than just business priorities).
- Improve employee connection to their employer and its values.

While only some of these may be your focus, they're likely to lead to other positive outcomes, such as an increase in overall volunteer participation rates.

If "all of the above" was your answer, consider bringing together a small team to collectively rank this list to see which rises to the top.

VTO and Company Culture

When discussing these types of programs and policies, many corporate social impact leaders express that volunteerism is ingrained in their company culture, and that offering volunteer time off shows a direct commitment to organizational values. These leaders also identified that VTO policies and programs are most successful if volunteerism is part of the company's culture.



Building a culture of volunteer engagement across a company requires many different building blocks and investments — such as supporting policies, programs and technology — that not just exist, but are collectively nourished, known and accessible for all employees.”



JUSTIN LAND — GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP PROGRAM MANAGER, DOW, INC.



DEVELOP A PURPOSE STATEMENT

While your guiding principle can help you to internally align your goals, it's also important to set the stage for your policy with an external-facing purpose statement. Think of this statement as an “elevator pitch” for your VTO program.

- For example, if your guiding principle is to encourage employees to follow their passion to engage with the community, your purpose statement might be:
The [COMPANY] Volunteer Time Off program provides all eligible employees with the option to utilize paid time during their workday to participate in community activities that align with their personal interests and passions.

When an applicant or new employee is learning about all the benefits of working at your company, the purpose statement should help them to understand the baseline objective of the program before getting into the details of the eligibility and guidelines.

BRING IN KEY INTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS

Since the impacts of VTO are widespread, it's key to gather those internally who will help you to approach the program design with care and intentionality. Whether you are building your program or policy from the ground up, reviewing your current program or revamping it, including the correct internal stakeholders is crucial.

Depending on your company's structure, there are a variety of internal teams that could provide valuable feedback. While the makeup of internal stakeholders will vary, some companies have found success beginning their conversations with HR and legal teams. These teams will know and understand the intricacies of the policies, benefits and regulations that most impact your employees. Their expertise may help you take the first steps in development, informing key topics such as:

- Overall policy development
- Benefits considerations and impacts
- Impacts on recruiting and retention
- Knowledge of timekeeping systems and employee data sources
- Risk/compliance/safety considerations
- Legal language or disclaimers that should be included

Since no two companies are alike, it's recommended that you take time to consider which other internal groups will best inform your policy development. Consider representatives from teams such as operations, finance, accounting, DEI, internal communications, marketing, public affairs and IT.



Depending on your organization’s structure and program goals, you may bring these teams into the planning process or circulate an early draft to these groups for feedback.

Practitioner Tip: *Do you have other policies that are being implemented soon? It can be helpful to launch a VTO program while refreshing/launching other policies, rather than as a standalone initiative.*

FACILITATE FEEDBACK SESSIONS

Aside from those who lead different business units, it can be helpful to have conversations with participants who represent different business settings and levels. These perspectives can be valuable in recognizing the impacts that the program could have on employees and can help to support program equity. Additionally, this connection will set the stage for early adoption from these representatives once the program is active.

The table below shows some of the common contributions that may come from these different groups. It’s important to recognize that these contributions are not limited to these groups and it’s valuable to consider all perspectives throughout the development process.

Represented Groups	Common Contributions
Senior Leadership*	Projections about the impacts of VTO on business priorities and strategy.
Middle Management	Input on how a VTO program will affect their teams and their daily operations. This information is crucial, especially if supervisors are required to approve VTO requests.
Regional Representatives	Feedback around certain nuances that will impact their team’s ability to participate as it relates to geographic differences in needs and operations.
Representatives of Diverse Work Settings (office, warehouse, off-site employees, etc.)**	Ideas for how best to enable participation from those in their roles, and identification of barriers that will impact their team’s ability to participate.

**Companies highlighted the importance of senior leadership buy-in, not only for approval and design of the program, but also for adoption. For example, some noted that they see a direct increase in VTO hours requested after leadership shares their own stories of volunteerism.*

*** Learn more by reviewing our [Making Social Impact Accessible for All Employee Roles and Settings](#) brief.*



Phase 2: Program Development

VARIANCE IN VOLUNTEER TIME OFF PROGRAMMING

There is no singular approach to creating a VTO policy or program. Some companies find success with a simple approach, leaving the guidelines vague and the approval at the discretion of the employee’s manager. Others find that a more rigid and prescriptive approach is best. Your planning process should aim to find the balance that works best for your company’s unique purposes and structure.

While intuitively, it may seem best to build out a very specific and detailed set of guidelines, many companies shared that this can have negative impacts on adoption and understanding of the program and can limit participation.

COMMON MISCONCEPTIONS

Our conversations with corporate social impact leaders unearthed common misconceptions about VTO, many of which may be helpful in your initial program or policy design.

Misconception	Reality
VTO program utilization will lead to exorbitant costs and interruption of business operations.	Even with ample employee utilization of VTO, participation observed is rarely at a level that causes an organization to see significant negative impacts from those who do participate.
VTO programs are only for salaried or desk workers.	While some companies do offer VTO programs only for a subset of their workforce, this often contradicts the objectives of these types of programs. By engaging key employees and teams in focus groups and program design, you can find equitable solutions that align with company structure and program goals, inclusive of all employee types.
VTO policies need to be rigid and heavily regulated.	Successful programs depend on several factors, and a strict, regulated policy isn’t always necessary. Companies that have trusted their employees to utilize VTO for the intended purposes have not seen significant instances of misuse. Some note in their guidelines that they may audit or verify submissions periodically.
If we leave VTO approval up to the discretion of supervisors, they won’t be supportive.	Corporate social impact leaders shared that if volunteerism is truly a part of company culture, managers will understand the importance of finding time for their employees to utilize these hours.

EQUIPPING MANAGERS

Corporate social impact leaders regularly work with middle managers and supervisors to ensure employees can participate without drastically impacting operations. This can include practices such as gathering direct insight from these employees about the activities or causes that are most important to them and working with the corporate social impact team to execute, or prioritizing company-organized opportunities that align with their availability.

It's also important to recognize and alleviate the obligation this puts on these leaders. If you're entrusting your managers to approve time off for volunteerism, it's necessary to equip them with everything they need to align with your organization's procedures. This can be anything from a few bullet points that summarize the program to a fully built-out toolkit that outlines the program and their specific responsibilities.

VTO Guidelines and Operational Considerations

Certain guidelines can also help ensure that operational considerations do not contradict the goals of VTO. One example is to offer an alternative opportunity or time for the employee to utilize VTO if the requested time must be declined due to operational needs.



It is our responsibility that managers and team members make decisions with both purpose and profit in mind. With that, there is an understanding that not all volunteer time off requests can be accepted. If a manager must decline a request, we encourage both the manager and team member to work together to find an opportunity to build this into the team member's schedule within the following 30 days. This builds trust between the manager and team member and allows the team member to engage in acts of service."

CARLI CASEY — SENIOR MANAGER OF CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY AND SERVICE, PDS HEALTH

GUIDELINES AND ELIGIBILITY BRAINSTORM

The questions and considerations below will help you identify the type of program or policy that will work best for your company, while considering many key factors. These questions are also included in the [Strategic Planning Worksheet](#) (Appendix I) for use during your brainstorm. Reflection conversations can include only your social impact team or a small group of internal stakeholders.



How can we make this policy or program equitable across all locations, employee types and work settings?

- Consider which employees will have the most difficult time participating in this program. Start with these employees as your focus and design with them at the forefront so they are not overlooked.



How many hours should each employee be allotted annually?

- The number of VTO hours offered varies widely by industry and company size. According to the [2023 CECP Giving in Numbers Report](#), the most commonly utilized VTO policy was the **8-hour policy** (41%), while the median number of VTO hours was **12**.
- Consider offering a baseline number of hours but allow more at the discretion of the employee's manager.
 - This can be a great way to increase volunteerism with those in flexible roles, but it's important to think about how this is best communicated. An unintended consequence of this structure can be challenges with employees focusing on the number of hours in the policy, and not utilizing more than that.
- If developing a policy that is global or spans business groups or subsidiaries, consider launching a "minimum standard" for hours allotted, so that operations located in different countries or businesses can offer more robust programs with more hours if they are able.



In what increments will employees be able to utilize these hours?

- Offering in smaller increments (e.g., two hours) can allow for more flexibility and can enable more widespread participation.
 - Nonprofits aren't always looking for a large group of employees to volunteer for a full day, so offering a smaller increment may align better with the organization's needs.
- Allowing increments of full or half-day only may be easier to manage internally, often decreasing the overall number of requests for leaders to review and approve.



How will this program interact with other employee volunteer programs and initiatives?

- Consider whether employees will be required to use these hours for company-organized service days or activities, or only for personally planned or small team organized activities.
- Have a plan to determine whether these activities will be automatically eligible for Dollars for Doers* funding or not.

**A "Dollars for Doers" or "Volunteer Grant" program is an initiative in which a company will make a financial contribution to an eligible organization on behalf of an employee who volunteers a certain amount of time to that organization. For more information, read [Dollars for Doers: A Guide to Employee-Driven Contributions for Nonprofits](#).*



What types of activities are eligible?

Beyond the types of organizations eligible, certain activities should also be taken into consideration when developing these policies. Some companies have found success in expanding their VTO eligibility for more than just volunteering with a nonprofit organization. Some examples to consider:

- Employee resource group (ERG) participation



While we started with a volunteerism focus, over the course of developing our policy, it took many different turns, perspectives and iterations. Ultimately, we asked ourselves: what are we trying to achieve? It was the power that different forms of engagement can have towards a positive employee experience. As a result, our global Volunteer & ERG Participation Policy was launched.”

JUSTIN LAND — GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP PROGRAM MANAGER, DOW, INC.

- Diversity, equity and inclusion activities (e.g., company-offered trainings or exercises)
- Hours for civic engagement or time off to vote
 - This is usually a separate policy, though some companies allow VTO hours to be used when employees volunteer as unpaid poll workers or election observers.
- Wellness activities
 - In rare instances, companies will blend time off to volunteer with time off to participate in wellness activities such as preventative care or mental health appointments.



Which organization types will be eligible?

When determining the structure of a VTO policy, one of the most important considerations is which types of organizations are eligible. Depending on the program goals, your list of eligible organization types may include:

- 501(c)(3) designated nonprofit organizations
 - To ensure alignment with your goals, you may want to discuss eligibility of organizations with:
 - Political affiliation
 - Religious affiliation
 - Advocacy initiatives
- Schools
 - Consider public versus private designations and whether there is a requirement for them to be accredited.
- Local government



Eligible Organization Tips:

- Depending on the types of organizations you choose, it may be beneficial to integrate eligibility listings and approvals into volunteer management platforms (such as Benevity, Bonterra, or YourCause), which may allow for automated or manual pre-approval of certain organizations or organization types.
- Many companies include a catch-all statement such as: *[COMPANY] reserves the right to decline any opportunities if it is determined that the organization's mission or activities conflict with the interests or values of [COMPANY].*
- As with other volunteer programs or policies, consider including an anti-discrimination clause.



Will certain employee types be ineligible?

As noted above, it's important to be as inclusive as possible with your VTO program. However, be sure to specify if there are any employees that will not be eligible for the program, such as contracted or temporary employees.

Eligible Employee Tips:

Below are some questions to ask your internal stakeholder team, based on observations from VTO policy documents:

- How long do employees need to be employed for them to be eligible?
- Will employees accrue hours or be granted them in one lump sum?
 - Be sure to discuss this with your HR team, as there may be policy implications to be considered.
- How will this program impact overtime or other benefits?
 - Most companies include a clause noting that VTO hours may not result in employee overtime.
- How will this policy impact employees who are unionized?
 - Connect with your Labor Relations team to understand these impacts and options.
- Will there be any restrictions for employees who are on performance improvement plans or are not meeting performance goals?
- Will the company need to pay out VTO hours if an employee exits the company?
- Will unused VTO hours rollover year to year?

Note: These guidelines don't need to be created from scratch. Think about your other programs (such as general volunteerism, Dollars for Doers or matching gifts) and consider how they can be mirrored for VTO. Often, keeping these aligned is beneficial for communication and simplicity.

Phase 3: Implementation and Adoption

CONSIDER A PILOT PROGRAM

Once an initial policy has been developed, some companies have found value in piloting the program with a selection of employees or in a certain location.

While not necessary, this can be a useful way to understand how VTO programs will impact operations, but this should be done very intentionally. Avoid the inclination to pilot your program with only groups of employees who will have an easier time participating (such as those located in a corporate office and/or who are salaried). If certain employees will have more challenges participating due to responsibilities or work environment, prioritize their participation in a pilot program and ensure thorough feedback is gathered.

COMMUNICATION

As with any employee engagement program or benefit, internal communication and education around VTO programs is incredibly important. Including your communication teams as an internal stakeholder in your strategic planning can help to identify the most effective methods and channels of communication.

For some additional considerations gathered from our conversations with corporate social impact leaders, see the [VTO Internal Communication Checklist](#) (Appendix II).

APPROVAL AND TRACKING

One of the most common challenges in managing VTO programs is finding an effective way to track hours utilized and details about opportunities. The roadblock is often finding the connection between HR systems (e.g., Workday, ADP) and volunteer management platforms (e.g., Benevity, Bonterra, YourCause).

In considering what will work best for your purposes, identify the types of information you need to capture, both for internal and external purposes (e.g., overall volunteer participation rates, participation by employees by job type or location, types of activities or organizations). By reflecting on these priorities, you may find that the data can be captured in just one of these systems, or that you may be able to fill gaps with data from surveys.



Note: An intentional FAQ section can make a huge impact on understanding a VTO program. Think through this with your internal stakeholders and focus groups to anticipate questions and update regularly to address others that arise.



Phase 4: Review and Revise

As is true with most organizational programs and policies, it's essential to routinely review your VTO policy. With the evolution of your business and the priorities of your employees and communities, it's important to continuously re-evaluate how your program or policy operates.

GATHER EMPLOYEE FEEDBACK

When reviewing, be sure to think critically about the successes and challenges of the program, as a commitment to continuous improvement. Consider gathering feedback by surveying employees or incorporating questions about VTO in an annual survey.

RE-ALIGN KEY INTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS WITH PROGRAM GOALS

It can also be helpful to bring key stakeholders into your review in order to consider how certain processes may be updated to best align with your goals. Some questions to ask your team when reviewing may include:

- Did our policy help us achieve or get closer to our goal for this program?
- Are there employees in specific roles who are still not utilizing the program? Why?
- What parts of the program do employees find confusing? Are there any themes in the questions asked to those who manage the program?
- Are we utilizing the best methods of communication for informing employees about VTO?

CONCLUSION

As companies continue to invest in employee community engagement programs, it's likely that the number of businesses offering VTO will grow. As these programs are created and reformed, companies should be focusing on crafting a policy unique to their company, goals and culture.

While no two companies are exactly alike, there are many aspects of these programs that can be gleaned from other companies of a similar size, industry or structure. If your employer currently offers a VTO program, even if you don't consider it to be perfect, know that there are many companies who would benefit from your experiences and expertise.

Whether it's through convenings, networking or professional relationships, take the time to initiate conversations around VTO programs and policies. If we grow collectively, we can all positively impact our companies, our employees and our communities.



APPENDIX I: STRATEGIC PLANNING WORKSHEET

Guiding Principle (internal):

Purpose Statement (external):

Questions to guide conversations with internal stakeholders:

- How can we make this policy or program equitable across all locations, employee types and work settings?
- How many hours will each employee be allotted annually?
- In what increments will employees be able to utilize these hours?
- How will this program interact with other employee volunteer programs and initiatives?
- What types of activities are eligible?
- Which organization types will be eligible?
- Will any employee types be ineligible?



APPENDIX II: VTO INTERNAL COMMUNICATION CHECKLIST

	<p>Include information about VTO in benefits packets for prospective employees.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ensure that your VTO purpose statement and basic information about your policy are included in benefits packets for applicants.
	<p>Discuss VTO in new employee onboarding and training.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Some companies have organized a small-scale volunteer opportunity (such as a virtual opportunity or small kit-pack) during onboarding or ask employees to participate in a volunteer activity within their first 90 days so that employees get hands-on experience right away.• If your managers are responsible for approving opportunities, consider a targeted section in new manager training that caters to those who will need to approve VTO hours.
	<p>Encourage employees to share how they're using VTO hours.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Whether through an annual survey, a Yammer or Slack channel, or in all-team meetings, find ways for employees to share their experiences with other employees.
	<p>Utilize internal volunteer influencers to help spread the word.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Equip Volunteer Ambassadors or ERG leaders with tools to help them share information about VTO.
	<p>Engage senior leadership.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ensure that senior leaders are participating in VTO, sharing their experiences and cascading information about the program to their teams.
	<p>Survey and gather feedback intentionally.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Annual and post-event surveys provide some of the most crucial feedback for continuing to optimize programs.



VTO INTERNAL COMMUNICATION CHECKLIST (CONTINUED)

Promote use of VTO as a key part of a day, week, month of service.

- Some companies frame these moments as “a time to use your VTO,” but also allow employees to utilize these hours for other opportunities throughout the year.
- This strategy provides a window when outreach from leadership can focus on conveying the importance of the program and getting involved, and business leaders are expected to encourage employees to get out and participate either through company-organized or independently organized opportunities.

Create tools that will help ease some of the more complex processes or systems.

- For example, produce a simple video or infographic that provides an overview of how to navigate a system.



**POINTS
OF LIGHT**

ABOUT THIS BRIEF

The findings in this brief are drawn from a series of research and conversations held in 2024, featuring Points of Light's Corporate Programs staff, CSR leaders from Points of Light's [Corporate Service Council](#) member companies and corporate citizenship practitioners in the field. We are grateful to everyone who contributed, and especially to those who generously shared their insights and input. Special thanks to Carli Casey, Rosie Drumgoole and Justin Land for their contributions.

For additional resources on employee community engagement, please visit:
pointsoflight.org/social-impact-resources-for-businesses/.

ABOUT POINTS OF LIGHT

Points of Light is a nonpartisan, global nonprofit organization that inspires, equips and mobilizes millions of people to take action that changes the world. Through our work with nonprofits, companies and social impact leaders, we galvanize volunteers to meet critical needs. As the world's largest organization dedicated to increased volunteer service, we engage nearly 4 million volunteers across 38 countries to create healthy, equitable communities where all can thrive.

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