



POINTS OF LIGHT
CORPORATE SERVICE COUNCIL

Engaging Retail Store Employees in Community & Volunteering Programs

October 25, 2025

Key Insights & Takeaways

Engaging Hourly and Deskless Employees

- **Access and Communication:** A primary challenge is reaching retail employees because they do not typically have access to company-issued devices or regular email access. Organizations are addressing this through mobile-friendly tools, and peer ambassador networks to share volunteer opportunities and track hours efficiently.
 - Quick and simple engagement methods, such as QR codes, are essential, as retail employees often have limited break time to review materials.
 - Some QR code tracking technology can offer track scans rates and device types, providing valuable data on engagement. One example is [Uniqode](https://www.uniqode.com). (<https://www.uniqode.com>)
 - Ambassador or “cascade” programs help spread information through trusted, on-site leaders.
- **Operational Balance:** Ensuring business continuity while encouraging employee volunteering requires leadership support and thoughtful planning. Local leaders must calculate how many employees are required to stay at the store to manage business operations.
 - Smaller stores with fewer employees often use multi-day or shift-based volunteering, allowing participation without disrupting operations. Spreading events over multiple days can also benefit smaller nonprofits who may not have capacity for large single-day events.

Equity in Volunteer Time Off (VTO) Policies

- **Fair Access and Compliance:** Many organizations are navigating the challenge of ensuring that hourly retail employees have equitable access to volunteer opportunities while adhering to state and labor laws.
 - Common strategies include providing a set number of paid volunteer hours per year and using specific payroll or benefit codes to track participation.
 - Some companies have piloted a Volunteer Time Worked (VTW) policy where employees can volunteer one day per year and be paid for that time. Employees would be eligible for overtime if they worked a shift the same day they volunteer.
 - Implementation requires close partnership with legal and compliance teams, with special considerations for specific state wage laws, such as California.

- Technology solutions help track hours even when employees lack computer access.
- Click [here](https://www.pointsoflight.org/volunteer-time-off-vto/) to learn more about implementing a VTO policy:
<https://www.pointsoflight.org/volunteer-time-off-vto/>

Balancing Employee Choice and Risk

- **Empowering Choice:** Offering employees a choice in selecting volunteer organizations they care about can boost engagement, but it requires safeguards to mitigate reputational or compliance risks.
 - Many organizations use an internal review process to ensure nonprofit eligibility, prevent conflicts of interest, and assess risk exposure.
 - Some companies add anonymity by donating to these nonprofits through a donor advised fund.
 - Data dashboards and tracking systems help monitor giving patterns, identify trends, and flag potential risks.
- **Using Data Strategically:** Participation data is used to inform future program partnerships. Causes that consistently attract employee interest often evolve into formal corporate partnerships, reinforcing alignment between employee passion and company purpose.

Strategies for Deskless Engagement

- **Ambassador Networks:** Establishing a network of trained ambassadors or regional leaders helps communicate opportunities and motivate participation amongst retail employees. These leaders often serve as champions of the company's social impact culture, helping bridge communication gaps and increase engagement.
 - Recognition and small incentives, such as grants to their chosen nonprofits or reward points, reinforce their efforts and leadership development.
- **On-Site Volunteering Options:** Kit-packing and similar on-site activities make volunteering tangible and easy for retail employees to join during work hours or breaks.
 - Best practice: pair the activity with a brief educational or storytelling component, such as a short video or written reflection, to reinforce the “why” behind the effort and deepen employee connection.

Engaging Remote Employees

- **Desire for Connection:** Remote employees continue to value in-person volunteering for connection and purpose, even when virtual options exist.
 - Offering hybrid engagement models—such as at-home volunteer kits or localized group events—creates flexible ways to participate.
 - Short-term and long-term partnerships both have value: one-time events provide accessibility, while ongoing relationships build deeper engagement.

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- **Communicating Impact:** Follow-up storytelling and impact reporting is critical for remote volunteer engagement

Benefits of Engaging Retail Employees in Volunteering

- **Local Impact and Pride:** Community engagement fosters a sense of pride and belonging among employees, strengthening their connection to the organization and its mission.
- **Retention and Purpose:** Engaged employees often demonstrate higher retention, stronger brand loyalty, and a deeper alignment with company values.
 - When employees are empowered to live their company's purpose, they, in turn, inspire peers to get involved—*“engaged employees engage employees.”*
- **Building Culture and Leadership:** Volunteer programs help reinforce company culture, provide development opportunities, and cultivate a sense of shared responsibility and belonging.