



**POINTS OF LIGHT**  
CORPORATE SERVICE COUNCIL

## **CSC Peer Discussion:**

# **Designing Best Practices for On-Site Workplace Volunteer Projects**

**February 25, 2026**

## **Points of Light's Core Principles for Designing Meaningful On-Site Volunteer Projects**

*The following core principles shape how [Points of Light's Activation team](#) design and deliver on-site volunteer activations worldwide and include examples and insights from Corporate Service Council members who participated in our recent session on On-Site Volunteer Projects.*

### **What core principles drive high-impact engagement?**

#### **1. Relevance Drives Engagement**

- Volunteer experiences are most powerful when they respond to timely, visible community needs. When employees understand why an issue matters right now, emotional investment increases significantly.
- Key question: Why does this matter at this moment?
- While the structure of an event may stay the same, the beneficiary population, kit contents, or framing must evolve to stay meaningful.

*CSC Example:* A natural disaster-focused project resonated deeply with employees because many had personal or peripheral connections to affected communities.

#### **2. Mission Context Is Essential**

- Volunteers need to clearly understand:
  - Who benefits from the work
  - What problem is being addressed
  - What changes because of their effort
- The strongest model includes:
  - A nonprofit representative sharing the mission in person. Or a company champion that can speak to the org's mission
  - Clear storytelling to articulate the need the project is addressing
  - Concrete examples of impact

- Without context, even well-designed activities feel transactional

*CSC Examples:*

- Explain how hygiene kits support individuals experiencing homelessness
- Share how standardized test kits for students boost their confidence
- Have veterans share stories of impact during service dog-related projects
- When beneficiaries or nonprofit partners tell their stories, the experience becomes personal rather than abstract.

### 3. Nonprofit Needs Must Drive Design

- High-impact experiences begin with asking:
  - What does the nonprofit actually need?
  - What would truly help right now?
- Companies should bring ideas as starting points, not fixed plans, and remain flexible on format, timing, and structure. **Flexibility is a force multiplier: it enables nonprofit-driven design, which elevates both community impact and the volunteer experience.**

### 4. Make Impact Visible Immediately

- Closing the experience with immediate impact reporting significantly increases meaning.
- Examples:
  - “You assembled 400 meals.”
  - “This supports 100 families.”
  - “This covers three days of service.”
- When volunteers see tangible outcomes, the emotional connection strengthens.
- Note: nonprofits often know the impact of the project before its completion – don't forget to ask for it!

### 5. Build Reflection Into the Experience

- Short reflection prompts deepen learning and shift the experience from activity to insight.
- Sample questions:
  - What surprised you?
  - What did you learn?
  - How might this change your perspective?

*CSC Example:* In addition, writing notes to accompany a kit encourages reflection, personalizes the experience and shifts the focus from speed packing to one of meaning.

### 6. Design for Engagement and Get Creative!

- Repetitive tasks can sometimes disengage participants. Enhance experiences by creating multiple roles within one project and matching tasks to different skills and abilities.

- For example, for a kit-packing activity, volunteers can:
  - Organize the items that will be included
  - Pack items
  - Break down boxes
  - Decorate kit packaging
  - Create cards to accompany the kits
  - Offer alternative options when there are dietary restrictions (e.g., non-peanut butter items)
- Atmosphere matters. Make it fun! Play music to keep the energy high and positive ([Sample playlist](#)).
  - A strong sense of teamwork drives engagement!
- Think outside the box! – (see *list our compiled list of “Think Outside the Box” Ideas below*)

## 7. Use Competition Carefully

- Competition should be used carefully and intentionally.
  - Competition is best used to encourage people to register and attend a project.
  - However, if competition is used during project execution, it can impact quality, increase errors, and potentially create a burden for nonprofits.
- If used, competition should emphasize collective impact — not “fastest wins.”

## 8. Leverage Internal Champions

- Volunteer experiences are stronger when internal leaders:
  - Participate visibly
  - Facilitate reflection
  - Connect the work to company values
- This shifts engagement from transactional to relational and builds long-term culture.

## 9. Anchor to Company Values, Not Just Location

- When employees gather from across the country, especially in centralized training environments, projects are more meaningful when tied to:
  - Company pillars
  - Shared values
  - Employee passions
  - Universal causes (e.g., food insecurity)
- This fosters shared responsibility rather than geographic detachment.
- Design each activation with a clear “what’s next” — equipping volunteers with practical ways to continue supporting the cause or apply their learning at home.

## Think Outside the Box!

*Below are creative, field-tested ideas from the Points of Light team and Corporate Service Council members to inspire innovative on-site build projects.*

- Building or making dog toys for service dogs
- Bike builds
- Furniture builds
- Skateboard builds
- Painting canvases for murals (paint by number)
- Painting ceiling tiles
- Stuffing teddy bears
- Ukulele Builds
- Knitting squares or blankets (with staff who know how to knit teaching their colleagues)