

Mining for Superpowers: How to Find the Skills You Need through CSR & Volunteerism

Corporations can be your best partners. It's up to you to reach out.

By Sima Parekh

Cleaning up a park, stuffing a truck with donations, framing a wall for a building project: These are some of the visuals that come to mind when we think of volunteerism. When we talk about Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), thoughts may turn to company-wide initiatives like sustainability practices or paid time off to volunteer in the community. Both kinds of efforts make a positive impact and both help organizations or causes that need support.

Now, imagine the potential if these efforts were proactively connected by the nonprofits who need them most.

As a nonprofit leader, you can take the lead in bridging the gap between CSR and volunteerism. You can work with companies to define their goals and target a specific outcome aligned with those goals. Internally, businesses can then mobilize the talents within their staff to achieve the desired outcome. In this way, combining efforts from the conceptual stage to execution, nonprofits and corporate CSR leaders can together reap the benefits of skilled volunteerism.

What about Afterward?

A park cleanup or a food drive will no doubt do a lot of good for a community. It can also boost company morale as coworkers break a sweat together, knowing they're giving back. But what about afterward? The echoes of that day often fade until the next year or the next time the CSR team has the bandwidth to take on the logistics of another event.

This is where you can become the expert and the catalyst for longer-lasting impact. By guiding companies on how to best promote skills-based volunteerism, you can draw out two vital components: knowledge and talent.

Longevity is the true value here – lasting, tangible results that come when nonprofits learn from those with business know-how. Maybe it's learning how to streamline fundraising programs or gaining insights into donor

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analytics. It could be a faster, more efficient technology infrastructure or a more donor-friendly website. Nonprofits can work with CSR departments to create these mutually beneficial partnerships.

Skills Are Superpowers

As we all know, the global pandemic has dealt a painful blow to nonprofit organizations. Many nonprofits that were already operating on tight budgets found themselves facing an uncertain future as resources were cut further. In a movie storyline, this is when the superhero would fly in and save the day.

Skilled workers are the superheroes nonprofits are calling for. They're the people who can set nonprofits up to survive hard times and to thrive going forward.


Those in corporate settings may not realize how invaluable their expertise could be to a nonprofit organization. Nonprofits need to educate CSR leaders on how tasks their workers handle every day could contribute to a community organization's success. By encouraging a CSR team to enlist the help of their skilled staff, those who need the support can find it in a truly transformational way.

Even better? Volunteers may discover superpowers they didn't even know they had. The organizational skills of office administrators might make them fantastic project managers. A designer's knack for spatial relationships may lend itself to creating a more efficient office design. Stretching to new areas can bring out leadership qualities or highlight potential mentors on a staff. Bringing established skills to the table can unearth new ones that benefit nonprofits along the way.

Virtual = Global

For nonprofits, what started as a devastating loss in terms of canceled galas, concerts, and other key fundraisers has morphed into an opportunity to reach donors well beyond their usual influence. To combat the pandemic, nonprofits moved events online or to a hybrid model. Thus, every affair went global by default. In terms of CSR and volunteerism, this means companies with teams ready to volunteer are no longer limited geographically: Any virtual initiative is a possible match.

For global companies the potential is even greater: For example, they could challenge their offices to see which one can make the biggest impact for a chosen cause. These are initiatives you can propose to CSR leaders.

As we all deal with the disturbances wrought by COVID, corporate CSR teams are energized to double down on making a difference at a time when it's needed more than ever. Nonprofits are looking to restrengthen for recovery and success going forward. By organizing specific skills-based volunteer programs, both can win. 

Sima Parekh is executive director of 48in48.org, a skills-based volunteer organization on a mission to mobilize marketing and technology volunteers to serve nonprofits worldwide by creating 48 websites in 48 hours for nonprofits.

Partner Up

For more on how you can partner with businesses for mutual benefit, see articles such as these at NonprofitWorld.org:

The Six Worst Errors You Can Make When Seeking Corporate Support (Vol. 35, No. 1)

For-Profits and Nonprofits Meet Missions Together (Vol. 25, No. 4)

Corporate Partnerships for Nonprofits: A Match Made in Heaven? (Vol. 30, No. 2)

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