

Employee volunteering
Observations from the front-line

A report on community & business
perspectives on employee
volunteering in New Zealand

by Dr Louise Lee

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Kaupapa Whai Pakihi

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Preface

As a university researcher my job is to uncover new knowledge – preferably the sort of new knowledge that other people will find useful. The new knowledge generated in this research provides important insights into employee volunteering programmes in New Zealand today.

This research would not have been possible without the participants, all of whom generously provided me with their time and thoughts, allowing me to complete this research. My thanks to them all. I am particularly grateful to the Volunteer Centres that participated in this study – the advice and practical assistance given at various stages of the research is very much appreciated.

I would also like to thank Massey University which provided funding for this project.

Dr Louise Lee
Project Manager

Introduction

Many businesses demonstrate their role as responsible corporate citizens through employee volunteering. Assisting staff to volunteer through employee volunteering programmes, enables businesses to actively support the well-being of local communities. Furthermore, studies indicate that employee volunteering is becoming one of the fast-growing areas of voluntary activity with businesses in the UK², Western Europe and North America³.

WHAT IS EMPLOYEE VOLUNTEERING?

Employee volunteering⁴ describes a new trend in volunteering in which businesses support their employees to undertake volunteering work in the community. Employee volunteering encompasses any volunteering activity which is supported or encouraged by the business, whether during work hours or in employees' own time. It can be related to the employee's professional skills or unrelated to these skills. Employee volunteering can take many forms including one-off team events, longer-term team assignments, individual-role volunteering and one-to-one mentoring.⁵

The assistance provided by the business can include giving staff time off to volunteer, finding volunteering opportunities for staff, organising team volunteering events, seconding a staff member to a voluntary organisation, awards and recognition for volunteer service, and donations to organisations for which employees volunteer.

WHY THIS RESEARCH?

The importance of employee volunteering has been acknowledged internationally, particularly in literature relating to corporate social responsibility.⁶ There is evidence to suggest that employee volunteering benefits the business, employees and the community organisation. However, much of the discussion to date has been linked to business goals for such programmes. Most development work internationally around employee volunteering is taking place within the business sector. Very little preparatory

² Tuffrey, M. (2003). Good companies better employees: How community involvement and good corporate citizenship can enhance morale, motivation, commitment and performance. London: The Corporate Citizenship Company

³ Cihlar, C. (2004). The state of knowledge surrounding employee volunteering in the United States. Washington DC: Points of Light Foundation.

⁴ Commonly used terms include employer supported volunteering, corporate volunteerism, corporate community involvement, business community engagement.

⁵ Ramrayka, L. (2001). Employee volunteering: The guide. London: The National Centre for Volunteering.

⁶ For example see: Imagine (2003). Engaging employees in the community: How to establish employer supported volunteerism in your company. Calgary, Canada: Volunteer Canada.

Lee, L. and Higgins, C. (2001). Employee volunteering: Ad-hoc interaction or route to dialogue and partnership? Journal of Corporate Citizenship 1(4), 79-90.

work is occurring within the community sector in which employees are volunteering. Furthermore, while businesses are increasingly looking to employee volunteering as a key community involvement strategy they don't necessarily understand the impact of employee volunteering programmes on community organisations.

In New Zealand research into corporate social responsibility strategies has been sparse. Furthermore there has been little previous research specifically focusing on employee volunteering. However, a 2006 study of business social investment activity in New Zealand found that businesses were involved in a range of community activities often involving staff engagement.⁷ Similarly a 2007 study of business community partnerships in New Zealand concluded that employee volunteering was a core element in the corporate community involvement strategies for all of the businesses in the study.⁸

Employee volunteering is a three-way partnership involving the employer, its employees and the community organisations that host these employees.⁹ This research examines employee volunteering programmes in New Zealand from the perspectives of three key stakeholders – managers in businesses that support employee volunteering; managers in the community groups or organisations that receive and host employees and Volunteer Centres that broker employee volunteering initiatives.

The research objectives were:¹⁰

- to examine how employee volunteering programmes and projects are organised and managed
- to explore benefits and challenges faced from both business and community management perspectives
- to investigate the role played by Volunteer Centres in fostering and facilitating employee volunteering

The purpose of this report is to provide a summary of the key messages that emerged from this research and to draw together some of these messages in a way that is useful for those who interact with business and community organisations in New Zealand. Ultimately the focus is on benefiting the organisations that participated – and others like them.

⁷ Business social investment activity in New Zealand (2006). Institute of Public Policy, AUT, Auckland New Zealand

⁸ Lee, L. (2007). Business community partnerships in New Zealand: Understanding experiences of partnership. Wellington, New Zealand: Massey University.

⁹ Ramrayka, L. (2001). Employee volunteering: The guide. London: The National Centre for Volunteering.

¹⁰ This is the first stage of a research study examining employee volunteering in New Zealand. The second stage of this research plans to explore the perspectives of the employee volunteers who are directly involved in volunteering projects.

How the research was carried out

THE PARTICIPANTS

The study involved managers from 29 organisations – 14 businesses; 13 community organisations, including five Volunteer Centres, and two government agencies. In total 36 in-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted involving managers from the 29 organisations.

The business and community organisations were all selected on the basis that they had participated in employee volunteering activities in New Zealand. Using a purposive sampling technique, organisations were selected according to community involvement strategies and types of employee volunteering activities. The selection process included reviewing employee volunteering programmes from business websites and reading Corporate Social Responsibility or business sustainability reports. The researcher's links within the business and community sectors also helped to identify potential research participants. The following section provides a brief description of the organisations that participated in the research.

The businesses

11 of the businesses that participated were large enterprises and three small/medium sized enterprises (SME), with the majority of the businesses operating in the service sector. The decision to focus on primarily large businesses is not surprising given that these businesses are more likely to have formalised community involvement programmes and dedicated staff to manage these.

Eight businesses had employee volunteering programmes operating on a national scale throughout New Zealand. The remaining six businesses and two government agencies supported employee volunteering projects in one geographic locality. All businesses in this study had relatively 'young' employee volunteering programmes (ie operating for less than five years). However, these programmes were undergoing significant changes. For example, over two-thirds of the businesses had formalised their involvement with employee volunteering with documented policies and procedures. Employees were encouraged primarily to participate in one-off team volunteering projects and individual volunteering. All of the organisations in this study used the services of local Volunteer Centres to find suitable volunteering activities for their employees.

The community organisations

The eight participating community organisations were involved in a variety of community activities including education, aged care, disability, environment/conservation and health. Four community organisations offered services through a network of offices throughout New Zealand. The remaining four community organisations delivered services locally, operating with five or less paid staff.

Community organisations experience of working with employee volunteers varied. For example, two community organisations had worked with large

numbers of employee volunteers either from a variety of businesses or one key business partner, for over three years. In two instances small local community organisations had developed on-going relationships with employee volunteers from local businesses. In contrast, some community organisations in this study were relatively new to working with employee volunteers, working with a variety of businesses on one-off employee volunteering team projects.

The Volunteer Centres

Five Volunteer Centres involved in brokering employee volunteering initiatives participated in this study. All Centres worked with business and community organisations to design volunteering opportunities and match employees to volunteering opportunities. The Volunteer Centres were at different stages of development with employee volunteering initiatives.

For example, three of the Volunteer Centres had employee volunteering programmes running for over five years. These Centres had spent considerable time preparing and researching the feasibility of establishing local employee volunteering programmes. Despite a sometimes slow uptake from local businesses, employee volunteering was now seen as a core service for the Centres. The Volunteer Centres had established clear objectives for their programmes and developed formalised policies and procedures to assist with managing employee volunteering initiatives. In addition two Volunteer Centres had paid employee volunteering co-ordinators solely dedicated to managing employee volunteering programmes.

The three Volunteer Centres supported mainly one-off team volunteering events. In the first seven months of 2007 alone the combined three Volunteer Centres had brokered 92 team projects, involving a total of 887 employee volunteers from 37 businesses throughout New Zealand. One Volunteer Centre had secured major sponsorship from a local community foundation in 2007 and 2008, solely to promote and facilitate employee volunteering projects in the Wellington region.¹¹

The remaining two Centres in this study had more ad-hoc involvement with employee volunteering. Both organisations responded to requests from businesses for possible projects as they arose. However, they had limited involvement with the hands-on facilitation of projects. One of the Volunteer Centres was involved in the initial stages of establishing a more formal employee volunteering programme. Key questions that the organisation was addressing included - Is employee volunteering right for our organisation? How will we benefit? What might the business want out of it? Do we have proper procedures in place to manage employee volunteers? What can we offer and do we have the required resources?

¹¹ The Wellington Region Foundation Corporate Challenge held Feb.-June 2007, involved 400 EVs, from 20 businesses, in 31 projects throughout Wellington.

THE INTERVIEWS

To capture a range of experiences managers with varying levels of employee volunteering knowledge were interviewed. 36 in-depth interviews were held with key informants from 29 organisations – 19 interviews with business and government organisations and 17 with community organisations. All interviewees had worked with employee volunteers, organising employee volunteering initiatives. Interviews were conducted throughout New Zealand from April through to December 2007. The majority of interviews were conducted at the manager's place of work with the exception of two telephone interviews.

Questions were semi-structured and framed around experiences concerning the organisation and management of employee volunteering initiatives, in addition to managers' personal employee volunteering experiences. While focusing on employee volunteering endeavours, interviews with business managers also examined community involvement programmes more generally. Interviews ranged from forty minutes to two hours (average 50 minutes). Each interview was tape recorded and the interview transcript was sent back to this individual for approval.

In addition the study used document analysis of pamphlets, brochures, policy statements, CSR and Annual reports, newspaper articles and press releases in relation to employee volunteering programmes and activities for the organisations involved.

What the research revealed

This section of the report summarises the main findings of the research. The summary is divided into three main sections:

1. Managing employee volunteering programmes
2. Benefits and challenges for community organisations
3. Volunteer Centres as employee volunteering brokers

MANAGING EMPLOYEE VOLUNTEERING PROGRAMMES

In considering how employee volunteering programmes are managed, six issues are examined:

1. Reasons for business involvement
2. Internal business support for employee volunteering
3. Staff participation
4. Communication and information sharing
5. Monitoring and evaluation
6. Benefits for business

Reasons for business involvement

Business managers described three key motives for supporting employee volunteering: a concern and interest in the community, their employees, and the business. In many cases these motivations were intertwined, representing a mix of internal and external concerns.

Community engagement

Many managers explained business support for employee volunteering as a tangible expression of corporate social responsibility. The notion of a moral and social 'duty to community' was frequently stressed as a key business driver for employee volunteering. Furthermore, employee volunteering was perceived as a key mechanism to demonstrate a 'giving back' role, both to staff and external stakeholders.

I think just generally being a good corporate citizen. I would define that in all aspects. Obviously in terms of your professionalism, but also the care that you show the community, your involvement in the community, and how you look after your people. So it's looking at the whole environment. Not just there to make a profit. (Business Manager 4)

I think the message they're trying to drive is that you can be a big company but you still have a social responsibility to others. And you don't have to get anything out of it for the business. You have a responsibility to assist these organisations that don't have the luxury of money or funds. That's the way I read it and that's the way I operate. (Business Manager 17).

Undertaking volunteering work in the community was seen as a key mechanism for community organisations to access resources and gain new perspectives, as one business manager commented:

With the community we see that they are able to do the things they set themselves out to do, rather than worrying about resources or projects that they won't actually be able to do because of lack of funding or lack of manpower, we are able to help them out. I think also the community benefits from having a different perspective. When you are from a corporate environment and a community environment, it seems like two different cultures with different mindsets, and I think there is quite a bit of benefit there as well in seeing the way things are done and the skills that we have available. (Business Manager 3)

Employee satisfaction

Employee volunteering was also understood as a concrete way business could support employees to 'do good deeds' through volunteering.

To be honest to see people that volunteer on such huge levels.....it's a relatively thankless task and they do put a lot of work in for very little recognition. I think I wanted to volunteer more out of respect for the people who do put in huge amounts of time....Because it doesn't really cost us anything, we don't take any time off work to do it. I mean how difficult is it for us to get out there and do something. It makes you feel good about helping. (Business Manager 10)

Employees 'feeling good' about themselves was an important outcome for business. Business managers consistently stressed the importance of employee engagement and satisfaction.

There's the sort of pleasure that we get from doing the volunteering and there's pleasure from saying, hey look I work for X and X support this, that and the other thing. (Business Manager 6)

For some, promoting volunteering was the prime focus, rather than promotion of a particular community cause or agency. For example, one business manager maintained that:

The key thing is to support the volunteering, so we would probably be inclined to say okay, as long as we got it signed off, it would probably be fine and you always have to factor in, what is the key purpose that you are trying to do – it's to encourage the volunteering. (Business Manager 13)

However, for others the cause did matter. Aligning community involvement strategies with business purpose and strategy was a key concern.

Business purpose

Managers of large organisations that were regularly involved in employee volunteering talked of the need to integrate such activities into overall corporate policies. Employee volunteering was seen by some managers as a fundamental vehicle to put into practice corporate responsibility strategies of the business, as one business manager noted:

So a big part of our social responsibility is two aspects. There's looking after our staff and there's working with the community. So I've talked about the community partnerships that we have and I've talked about working with the

community more hand in hand. But the other aspect is sending our staff out into the community, it's a mutual benefit. It's a win on all social fronts. It's winning in terms of looking after our staff, supporting the values that they have for being out in the community and helping a good cause and it's supporting the community by giving our staff time to help the community. (Business Manager 13)

Some businesses wanted to find ways employee volunteering could leverage existing sponsorship relationships.

I think that from a sponsorship perspective, leveraging our sponsorships, a key part of that is using our staff. We have 6000 staff so actually did make sense to bring the community into sponsorship, to leverage sponsorships and then to get staff actively involved and to be ambassadors almost for us. (Business Manager 11)

Other businesses were interested in the potential for employee volunteering to demonstrate commitment to local communities and market images of the 'caring corporate citizen'.

It's about sending the right message to the market, to customers, other businesses. It certainly doesn't hurt to say, this is us, we like to do this, we're going to get out and help people. This is the kind of organisation that we are. ...Whether it's the primary driver or not, I'm not sure. And I certainly can't speak for the organisation when I say this, even though I do work for them. (Business Manager 10)

For some businesses it was hoped that corporate responsibility initiatives, including employee volunteering, could serve as a potential source of competitive advantage.

It's about listening and engaging and responding well to the issues and then organising that each year with a performance report. And it was a point of differentiation as well. No other X was really doing it. (Business Manager 4)

Employee volunteering was seen as a good avenue for staff development and team-building. In some instances employee volunteering initiatives were planned by the business to develop job-related skills. For example, two businesses had specifically designed employee volunteering activities with the objective of developing graduate competencies in project management.

The graduates are trying to get project experience, real life experience and within the office that's actually quite hard to provide. So this is a great little thing and they've got to do a programme, they've got to work out their resources, they've got to work out the health and safety implications, they've got to work out a plan for the day, getting people together and then they have to write a brief report to the general management team. (Business Manager 7)

Comments from business managers also suggested that involvement in employee volunteering could benefit the business in terms of positive impacts on staff morale and loyalty. However, other managers stressed that while team-building and improved staff morale may be 'added bonuses', they were not the primary objectives for employee volunteering.

I think team development is a by-product of what happens when you do a volunteer day, I mean it's a benefit of doing it. It's not the purpose of doing it. If you go about treating it as if it's the purpose of doing it, I think you lose the value of the benefits to the community. (Business Manager 13)

Reasons why businesses support employee volunteering revealed an often uneasy interplay of business, employee and community focused motivations. However, all successful employee volunteering programmes require on-going support and investment. The following section outlines the various kinds of support provided by business to assist employees to volunteer.

Internal business support

Top management support

Top management guidance and commitment is a key element in employee volunteering. Many managers stressed the importance of senior management commitment to corporate responsibility and the concept of employee volunteering. For all multinationals in this study top management commitment to employee volunteering in New Zealand was strongly supported by the global corporate responsibility strategies of parent companies.

The thing is that you need to have the buy-in from top down because if you can see that the CEO is doing it and you hear someone saying, well I don't have the time and you can actually say, you know the CEO did it and he probably doesn't have time either ...it has to have management endorsement and support because the CEO might launch a programme but if the senior management don't believe in it, they don't recommend it, they don't allow it the staff to take time off, you have a programme but you have no one buying into that programme because there is no support for the programme so there has to be that support, people have to believe and support it as well. (Business Manager 3)

Management support was seen as more than having policies and guidelines. Senior management participation was a key issue, as one business manager explained:

I think it's important that management support is there and it's visible. So far we've managed to get senior management involved. They did the folding, they did the tree planting, there was a senior management person there at the games, there was a different person there for each activity. (Business Manager 6)

Programme staffing

For large businesses there was recognition that processes to manage employee volunteering activities required the establishment of company-wide policies and a degree of centralised control with regard to volunteering. This was particularly important for businesses wanting to support volunteering initiatives across a range of office locations. In this study the location of primary responsibility for employee volunteering programmes varied across the businesses. For example, five large businesses had a centralised corporate responsibility (or sustainability) division that was responsible for the running of the employee volunteering programme. This was often linked with

staff responsible for community partnerships, corporate giving and sponsorships.

Other large businesses used departments such as public affairs, marketing or HR to manage their programmes. In two instances community support committees, involving senior management and general staff, were established to coordinate community involvement activities including the consideration of applications for employee volunteering. However, some businesses had no-one formally responsible for employee volunteering. Instead managers or employees were engaged in managing employee volunteering activities in addition to their daily duties. Finding the time to plan and administer employee volunteering initiatives was a challenge for some businesses.

Employees were required to have senior management approval prior to participating in employee volunteering activities. For large businesses this authority was dispersed to local managers, a sensible arrangement if employee volunteering activities operated throughout the country. All of the businesses that had national employee volunteering programmes had established budgets dedicated to corporate community activities. Decision-making regarding strategic direction and expenditures was largely centralised with senior management.

Policy development

Formalising business intentions helped demonstrate top management commitment to employee volunteering. Developing employee volunteering policies also helped to give programmes continuity and consistency. Nine businesses had formalised their employee volunteering programmes with documented policies and procedures. Other businesses were working towards developing an employee volunteering policy. Most policies outlined programme objectives, how much volunteering can happen and when it happens, managerial approval procedures and reporting requirements.

SMEs, in contrast to large businesses, took a more informal approach. None of the SMEs had formalised their intentions around employee volunteering by developing written policies. Managers tended to report low levels of expenditure directly associated with employee volunteering. These expenses were generally absorbed by the business or the volunteers themselves. The SMEs in this study had relatively limited experience with employee volunteering (ie less than one year), often revolving around one-off projects rather than on-going employee volunteering programmes as such. However, managers also argued that size and the collegial nature within SMEs could be an advantage in organising employee volunteering initiatives:

In terms of size the benefits were such that just about everybody here was involved, so it had a sort of proportionately much higher impact really. (Business Manager 9).

One of the advantages of being small is that it is easy to co-ordinate because you know everyone sitting next to you, it's really easy to arrange, and because we are small it's intimate so I would know if my staff members were even slightly interested in it..... Yeah and everyone could participate so it wasn't that we had to rotate it round or anything so everyone could do it, it was a full team. (Business Manager 5)

While not all businesses had developed a specific employee volunteering policy, many businesses had established processes to manage their volunteering activities. The following sections outline how employee volunteering strategies were implemented and managed.

Opportunities for volunteers

Employee choice was a cornerstone for all employee volunteering initiatives. Businesses were keen to develop internal processes that made it easy for staff to find out about volunteering opportunities and encourage participation.

Employees were offered a variety of options relating to

- the type of volunteering activities
- working as an individual or part of a team
- short-term or on-going involvement
- volunteering related to business-skills or not

The majority of businesses allowed staff to volunteer during work time, many having a policy of one day of work time per year. A few businesses had provisions to grant time in-lieu. Sometimes staff volunteered outside of work hours. However, this was the exception rather than the rule in this study.

All businesses acted as brokers assisting employees in varying degrees to find volunteer opportunities. Some businesses allowed staff to select their own volunteering activities while others used business staff to identify potential volunteering opportunities. Finding meaningful volunteer opportunities was an on-going challenge. Many of the businesses in this study worked with local Volunteer Centres to assist them in identifying volunteering opportunities. Businesses endeavoured to provide employees with a variety of volunteering opportunities over different time scales and during different times of the year to try accommodate work and outside commitments.

Employees were encouraged primarily to participate in one-off team activities and individual volunteering. One-off team volunteering most often involved a business working with a number of different community organisations over a span of time. Most employees preferred volunteering roles unrelated to their professional skills.

I think the X (community organisation) are looking to us to do that project because of the skills of the business. But we'd rather be out there doing something physical. Building something or painting something because we

work with our hands and heads. We write reports, we draw drawings, we design. But we'd like to get out in the open air in our own time and make something – plant trees or do things like that. So we work together. (Business Manager 8)

The most popular volunteering activities included fund-raising; gardening, maintenance (eg painting, building, cleaning) administration (newsletter distribution, photocopying, brochure folding, phone recruitment, bag packing) social (eg facilitating sport and recreational activities; event assistants eg Christmas functions; spending time with prisoners on a regular basis).

One-off team activities were attractive to employees who were new to volunteering and did not necessarily want to commit to volunteering on an on-going basis. These activities provided employees opportunities to “dip their toes in the water”. It also suited businesses that preferred to work with one community organisation to complete a set task and then move on to work with other community organisations.

Business needs versus staff choice

Business managers believed that the interests of staff were a top consideration in organising volunteering activities. Nevertheless, employee volunteering opportunities that linked with core business strategy were increasingly desirable. For example, in some instances businesses were keen to use employee volunteering to support the development of longer-term partnerships with community organisations. As businesses realigned their employee volunteering programmes to core business strategy potential community partners (and potential sources for volunteering opportunities) had to fit within broader business themes for relationships to be established.

So this idea of key communities, they shouldn't be arbitrary key communities, they should have some kind of correlation.....a clear connection to what we're doing (as a business). (Business Manager 6)

Other businesses wanted employee volunteering to support partnerships, often based around sponsorship relationships that the business had already established with community organisations. This kind of leveraging required interconnection between areas of the business such as sponsorship, public affairs and community programmes, as one manager explained:

The Trust is a great example where we give a certain amount of money each year and we're probably not doing enough with them and they've got some great environmental programmes. They're working with us at the moment and we want to get our staff involved - what a great opportunity rather than going off, sending a whole team of people to do some other environmental initiative and the Trust going, well hold on ... (Business Manager 11)

For some businesses it was important that proposed volunteer activity reflected staff development outcomes such as team-work, leadership and skills development.

I think the team thing is that it gives a benefit that you can get the team building alongside it, they like doing things with their peers. I guess the thing with our organisation, we are a very young organisation in terms of average age, so people do like to do things with their peers, they get to gel with them

better and build those relationship and they are doing something that makes them feel good at the same time. So there is sort of a business benefit as well as a personal benefit and it is easier in the corporate sense to make something work if you get all those things working. (Business Manager 4)

We used it really as a project management training exercise for our young cadets. So we had a graduate engineer and a graduate planner. The graduate engineer we had project manager and there were a couple of cadets who we assigned to him.....We allowed them to get together in work time and we had various meetings when we were designing the job because we decided to use it as a training exercise. (Business Manager 8)

Some business managers were keen to encourage volunteer activities that more closely related to the professional experience of the employee volunteer. Using employee volunteering to draw on the core competencies of staff was a key consideration as one business manager explained:

Employee volunteering has been part of our corporate citizenship programme that has been based around a whole suite of initiatives. The focus has mainly been around the area of education and using technology to increase ICT literacy....we encourage our employees to be not only employees but to be part of the wider community in which the business operates because they have skills and expertise that they can give and so that is why we try and encourage it because ultimately we are trying to support development of ICT literacy skills in general. (Business Manager 2)

Business managers talked of tensions between maximising employee choice and employee volunteering activities meeting strategic business needs. However, on the whole employees in this study had considerable freedom in selecting their own volunteering activities, often aided by a variety of choices provided by the business. Overall the choice of volunteering activity tended to be driven by the needs of employees and the business rather than the receiving community organisation.

Staff participation

Encouraging staff participation was a key element in managing employee volunteering initiatives. Managers of large businesses working to develop programmes across a range of sites reported that staff participation was slow in the beginning. However, participation rates had picked up over time as programmes became better organised and resourced.

For large businesses a critical issue was capturing staff participation numbers. Measuring the extent of employee volunteering was difficult as it was not always arranged centrally but instead agreed more informally with the employee's line manager, as one manager commented:

My feeling is that there is a lot more that we don't see. Some people just do it because it is what you do, so they don't really report it...But I know for a fact that staff will take an hour of their day, a couple of times like that through the year and it is just unreported so there is definitely more involvement than we see reported. (Business Manager 3)

Barriers to participation

It was important that as many staff as possible were able to participate in employee volunteering initiatives, given the potential business and personal benefits from volunteering. However, evidence indicates that not all staff had the same opportunities to get involved. The major barriers to greater staff involvement were: pressures and nature of work; lack of line managers' buy-in and inadequate information sharing.

Although programmes often provided business time for community work, staff frequently worked under pressure to compensate for time spent volunteering. Business managers spoke of difficulties scheduling time for volunteering, with staff often having limited 'windows of opportunity' to volunteer because of the work pressures. In addition the nature of work for some staff made it more difficult for them to volunteer, as one manager explained:

It's very difficult to pull people off the phones and schedule people to take time away, like over and above breaks and holidays. So it's very difficult to get people off the phones and that was one of the things that sort of impaired the team day, group activities. People didn't feel so compelled to do or perhaps the previous programme wasn't very open for people to do it as an individual and so they thought you had to do it as a team and then in Call Centres of course it's very difficult to take whole teams away from the floor. So that was one of the things that was impairing people. (Business Manager 17)

Lack of line manager's buy-in can make it difficult for employees to volunteer, particularly when line managers have the prerogative to release staff during work time. Getting managers' buy-in was a key challenge for some businesses in this study, as one business manager commented:

You've got consumers facing staff and if they're not there, they have to borrow a member from someone else or they come back and they've got double the work, so there is a reluctance to do that and I think some of the Managers are often, because of staffing concerns reluctant to give them the day off. (Business Manager 11)

Sometimes middle management reluctance was explained as a response to work pressures and seemingly competing objectives within the business as one manager commented:

The middle managers have got strong advice from above that they must have achieved these certain targets and levels of performance. They then are relaying that to their team, you've got to achieve these and those frontline people are sort of at odds with this, it's mainly them who are involved in the sustainability action team as well, those frontline people. They're trying to have that passion and live that value but at the same time they're saying the Team Leaders are inhibiting that. (Business Manager 13)

Lack of information about employee volunteering programmes was another major barrier to greater staff involvement. Communication issues related both to information about the employee volunteering programme itself and more specifically to volunteering opportunities available for staff. Large organisations made extensive use of their intranet, email, and in-house publications to inform staff about their employee volunteering programmes, to advertise volunteering opportunities and to publicise stories about volunteering.

However, business managers commented that communication alone was not enough. Ongoing promotion was also required. Comments from business managers confirmed the importance of informal networks and 'word of mouth' in promoting employee volunteering.

So posters, we have an internal monthly newsletter, electronic newsletter that goes out, so we do a lot of profiling in there for example, we have put the award winners in there and we are going to do little profiles of them over the next few months, we launched it through that. But a lot of it is sort of that email type communication with the posters. And that works to a certain extent but word of mouth is the best way - keeping it front of people's minds. (Business Manager 4)

Businesses were also offering a range of incentives and rewards to encourage employee participation. Some examples included awards and recognition given by top management at business events, cash grants and in-kind donations to nonprofits where employees volunteer and credit for community involvement activities in employee performance evaluations.

One of the capabilities that we've got is innovation and sustainability and so what I told staff is can you put something in your KPIs (key performance indicators) or in your capabilities that is around the involvement that you have with sustainability initiatives. So it's there. I mean we are very strong on sustainability, so why don't we have it at that level? (Business Manager 13)

Communication

Soliciting employee input to the programme while moving the programme forward as a company initiative was a major challenge in running an employee volunteering programme. Despite staff interests being a key consideration, in most cases senior management had strategic influence over the direction employee volunteering programmes took in the business. Staff input in many cases was sporadically obtained, often as a follow-up to participating as a volunteer. Nevertheless, businesses were keen to increase staff participation and some were beginning to encourage general staff input and feedback, as one business manager commented:

We polled the staff to find out what they wanted to support and they came up with about five cause areas, so therefore we use that as our guiding causes that we direct effort into. (Business Manager 4)

In another example, a series of focus groups with staff was run to find out what staff perceived as barriers to participation. One barrier identified by staff was that the criteria for volunteering were too narrowly focused on business objectives relating to sustainability. The manager explained what happened as a consequence:

So we widened the scope of what people could do consistent with the mandate of it being a socially responsible activity. So, yeah that's been a lot more successful. (Business Manager 13)

All businesses talked of the importance of 'on the ground' champions for promoting employee volunteering. Staff at local branch/office level played a crucial role in sharing information and encouraging participation, as one business manager explained:

You need to have that local encouragement, someone who is putting it on their team meeting agenda. I can't do that. So what I did was I asked for community championsa network has been set up as a two way information channel so I will send information to them, I tell them that this is what is happening and I tell them look, two months to go, end of financial year, let's get people revved up. (Business Manager 3)

Internal champions played a crucial role particularly for large businesses seeking to increase staff involvement in multiple communities throughout the country.

We've actually got 100 champions but they're all part of what we call the sustainability action team and there's six different teams around the country, amounting to about 100 people they're based in Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch and also in the smaller cells in between. And their role is to help, to advocate, to tell people about sustainability and what it means to the company and what you can do to be involved. But also to be responsible for taking action as well... being the change that you want to see essentially. (Business Manager 13)

You can't be all around the country, this is it. It certainly became quite obvious to me after I'd been in the role, last year it certainly became clear that unless you've got the whole building involved it was going to be a 'them and us' situation and 'why aren't you doing this' and 'why can't we do that'. When new management came upstairs I sort of said, look, we really need to redefine this because this is what I think and so it was good. So I've had some input to that. (Business Manager 17)

Significantly there was very limited consultation with community organisations in regards to employee volunteering programme design or on-going decision-making processes. However, a few businesses had developed formal consultative forums that offered opportunities for business, community and public sector representatives to discuss corporate community involvement strategies including employee volunteering programmes. Such initiatives were important mechanisms to encourage wider consultation and greater information sharing. In addition networks built with local Volunteer Centres had enabled some businesses to share general information and volunteering opportunities, creating opportunities to work together. The role of Volunteer Centres as employee volunteering brokers is discussed later in this report.

Monitoring and evaluation

In this study there were few examples of systematic evaluation of the impacts of employee volunteering on employees, the business, community organisations or local communities. For some businesses measurement wasn't a priority. Less than half of the businesses kept records on employee volunteering initiatives. Feedback on employee volunteering initiatives was received in a variety of ways including 'word of mouth', emails, personal contact and letters. And this feedback was largely from staff.

There was little evidence of formalised feedback from community organisations. Key messages from community organisations centred around

a 'thanks' rather than an evaluation of achievements from the project. Without feedback from community organisations it is very hard to assess the impact of employee volunteering on community organisations and the communities they serve.

Of those who did attempt to measure programme results, most focused on recording inputs rather than outcomes of programmes. For example, business managers commented on monitoring staff numbers involved and hours contributed. As previously discussed, capturing staff participation numbers was a critical issue for business managers.

Some of the larger businesses made formal reports on the results of their employee volunteering programmes, often as part of their annual corporate social responsibility or sustainability reports. Once again results were most often reported in terms of numbers of staff involved, hours volunteering. These statistics were often accompanied by stories focusing on staff perceptions of volunteering, reinforcing the importance of programmes serving the needs of employees.

However, measuring results was a concern for some businesses. This was particularly true for large businesses that devoted significant resources to employee volunteering. Measuring results was important because of the need to get internal buy-in for employee volunteering programmes. Business managers commented on growing internal pressures to justify the business return for community involvement initiatives such as volunteering. Some of the pressure for measurement and evaluation was also being driven by parent companies global CSR strategies.

Well we have to understand from an economic perspective how much it is costing in terms of time but also in terms of the take up of the programme. So for example, if it has been taken up in some offices and not others, why is that the case. Maybe there is an issue with communication or maybe sponsorship or you know support from some of the leaders in that office, that sort of thing. So you need to understand what is happening. But what we also need to understand is that we have a requirement now as part of our global firm, because they have set up a Global Foundation to report in our statistics and how New Zealand is doing in terms of volunteering etc. So it is being driven by several angles. (Business Manager 4)

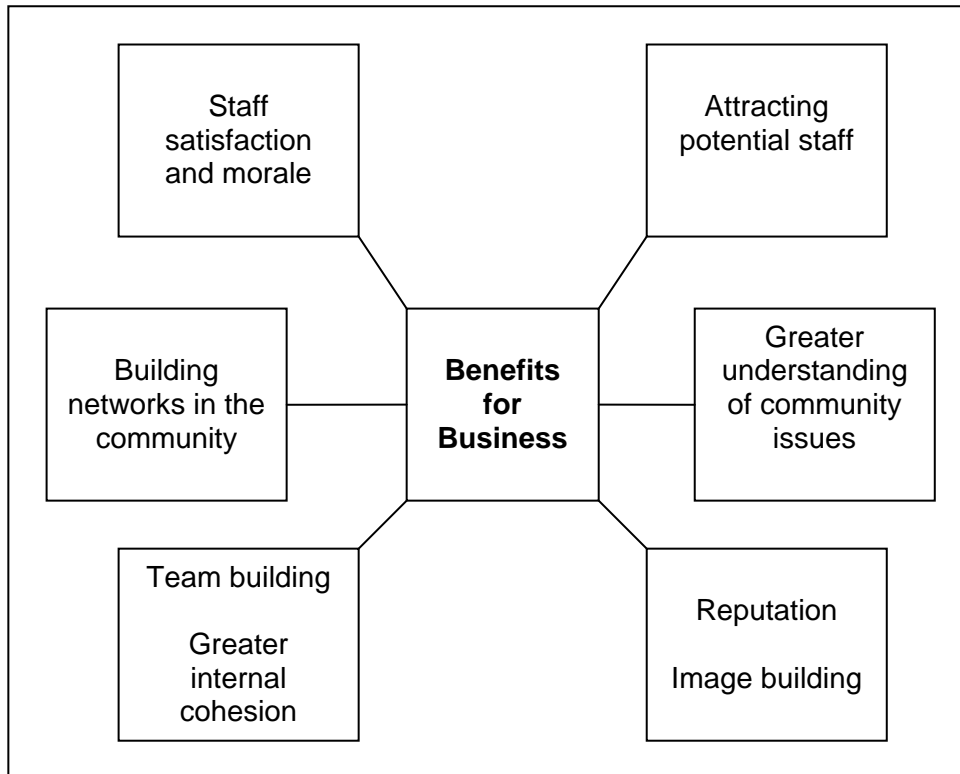
Key challenges for measuring programme results included the lack of defined or measurable programme objectives, lack of time, and limited knowledge of suitable measurement practices.

Benefits for business

In spite of limited knowledge of how desired goals were transformed into actual results, business managers claimed a number of business-centred benefits from employee volunteering. Employee volunteering was seen as a mechanism to mobilise business resources to address community problems; an avenue to attract potential staff and develop staff skills; a path to strengthen and extend internal and external networks and a strategy to

enhance reputation and profile. Business-centred benefits from employee volunteering are summarised in Figure 1.

Figure 1



We had a lot of fun. It increased our community profile.....We want to contribute to the success of the community, which we've done. We want to be part of the community. We're a good corporate citizen and we want to look after the environment, so the success is that we're contributing to the environment....We also want to be a firm where employees say they want to work for us and they're doing that. We get people coming and saying 'I want to work for X. I've heard about them – they're a great company'. We are getting that. (Business Manager 8)

I think the idea just should be promoted and really given a push. The company got more out of it than I ever expected, so the benefits are really very apparent. The ability for teams to be talking about what they have done and telling everybody, it just adds a cohesiveness, no matter what size the business is and that feeling of wellbeing because you have actually helped someone else. (Business Manager 9)

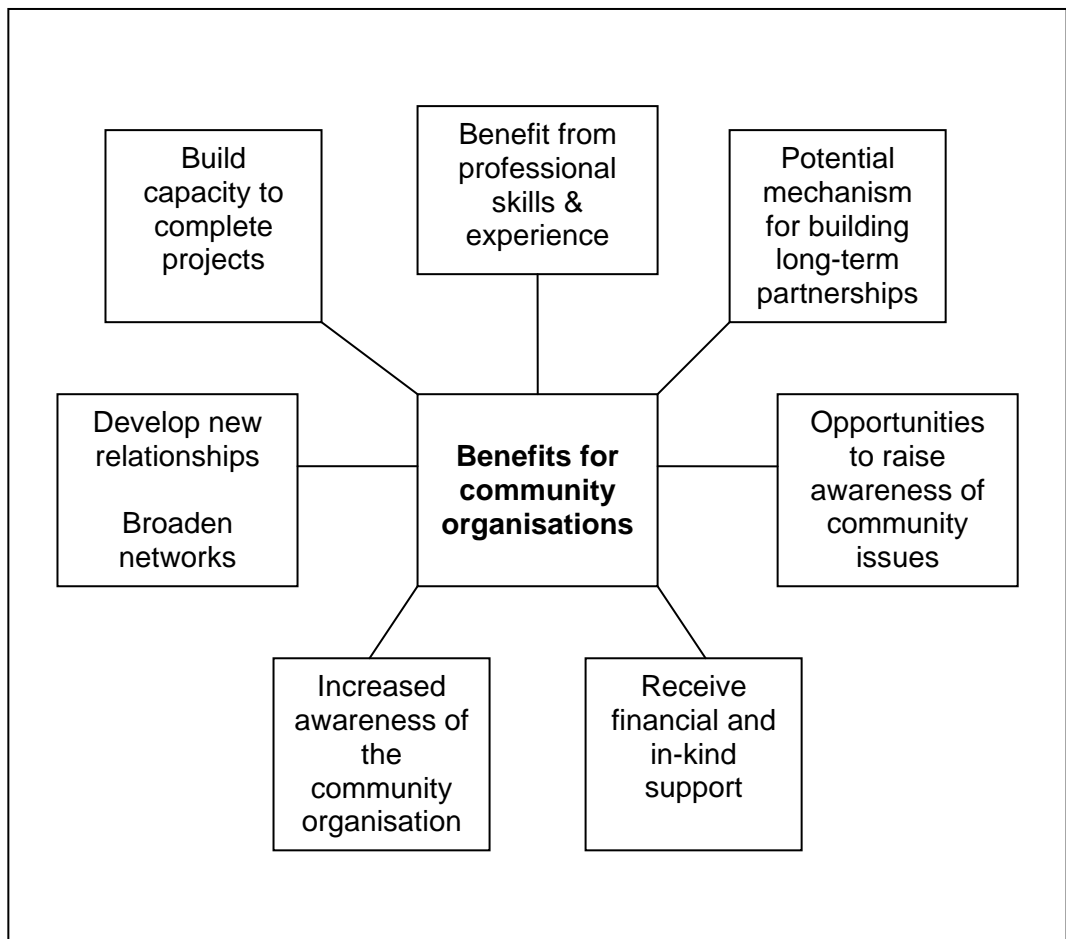
Much research into employee volunteering has focused on business goals for such programmes. However, this study also examined ways community interests are reflected in employee volunteering. The following two sections examine benefits and challenges for community organisations and the role played by Volunteer Centres in facilitating employee volunteering initiatives.

BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES FOR COMMUNITY ORGANISATIONS

Benefits

All community managers in this study reported that overall being involved in employee volunteering projects had been a positive experience for their organisations. Managers described a number of benefits from involving employee volunteers, as summarised in Figure 2.

Figure 2



Accomplishing general tasks or projects that wouldn't necessarily get done was foremost among the benefits mentioned.

From one day's work we see huge results. While the projects would get done they would take much longer.....We've always had positive experiences with business groups – they know each other, they pull together as a group, they are there to help out. (Community Manager 8)

Community managers also appreciated the opportunities to meet new people and broaden their 'normal' networks through engaging with business and employees directly.

Most of the groups that I am in contact with are really into what we do, so I thought it was really good that we could get in contact with a group outside of our circle. I was pretty excited because it did open us up to a group completely outside of our normal network, I thought that was actually a huge advantage. (Community Manager 6)

Many community managers made good use of the time they spent with the volunteers to raise awareness of community issues.

We took a break for lunch and just gave them the basic rundown of what we do and showed them round the building, the programs, what we do, who we work with, what we have to offer.... the nature of what we do goes in and out of the media, so just anything I can do to get public awareness. (Community Manager 6)

I guess I like to take opportunities to minimise the impact of mental illness and for the community. We are trying to do our bit to reduce the stigma and yes I see that as a really good opportunity.... I think the corporate sector needs to be informed of mental illness and the impact it has on people's lives. (Community Manager 9)

Community managers were ambivalent with regards to the effect employee volunteering had on recruitment of volunteers. In some cases community managers were aware of employees who did return to volunteer as individuals, often in their own time. However, the extent to which this might have happened as a result of employee volunteering experiences was difficult to gauge as community organisations did not have sufficient data to verify.

Some community managers commented on the potential benefits employee volunteering could offer to improve community organisational capacity to deliver programmes and services. For example, working with employee volunteers might provide opportunities to enhance professional skills and experience within community organisations. However, the overwhelming number of employee volunteers in this study preferred roles using generalist skills rather than specialised professional skills.

Community organisations were also benefiting beyond receiving support from employee volunteers. Some businesses contributed in-kind or financial support to enable volunteering projects to proceed, as one community manager described:

The employee volunteers were doing some painting work out at a play centre and we went in to visit the centre and they kept saying, oh we've got that, we can bring that and oh yeah, we've got this, we'll bring that too. (Community Manager 4)

Most community managers talked of the benefits of employee volunteering in terms of impacts on their own organisations and the ability for businesses to contribute meaningfully to local communities. However, one community manager also talked of employee volunteering offering opportunities to build a wider appreciation of the value of volunteering for its own sake.

It's the whole investing in the future of volunteering for its own sake. Investing in the pay it forward concept, allowing people to do something that they'll enjoy in the hopes that will make life better. And then, for some places it is having more links to the community that we serve. And there's the whole thing about getting the word out, who we are, what kinds of things we do. And then the last one and I would always put it last, is actually getting stuff

done, that's usually what people think of as volunteering, you volunteer to get stuff done (Community Manager 1).

In a few cases employee volunteering was the first step towards developing longer-term business community relationships. For example, in two cases volunteering opportunities had continued for over two years, supplemented with contributions of in-kind and financial support from the businesses involved. Comments from community and business managers indicated that a key success factor in these relationships was the quality of the relationships between key individuals involved:

Yes it is both sides and they have to lay out their expectations equally like when we turn up, we lay out our expectations saying we will do this but we will not do.... you have got to admire X (community manager) she is wonderful, but you don't know if next year there might be someone completely different. She is a major factor from my point of view ... she is just a lovely, kind person, she is good natured, you know she really appreciates what we actually do, so she is the hub of the whole relationship. (Business Manager 1)

However, developing longer-term business community relationships through employee volunteering was relatively rare. Most community organisations worked with a variety of businesses on short-term, one-off projects.

Although many of the community managers described positive experiences with employee volunteering, a number also mentioned challenges that they faced in managing employee volunteering projects as discussed in the following section.

Challenges

While businesses were the key initiators of employee volunteering, community organisations were the crucial designers of specific projects. Facilitating employee volunteering activities can take a considerable amount of work. Business managers spoke appreciatively of the support they received before and on the day of team projects:

She was there overseeing everything...and so she organised the people that were supervising us. She had a couple of the neighbours looking after us as well. She did a great job. (Business Manager 14)

It was really helped by X who is a volunteer herself and she is just wonderful, she led off with a full kind of story about the place and all that sort of thing and that actually really got people going, it wasn't just turning up to do a bit of hard graft, they were seeing it in context...she was a treasure, we couldn't have done it without her. (Business Manager 9)

However, many of the community organisations involved in this study were small organisations operating with limited resources and minimal paid staff (less than five). Only two of the community organisations had managers that were dedicated to supporting volunteers. Perhaps unsurprisingly, comments from community managers indicate that organising employee volunteering

projects can put pressure on resources and existing staff who are often volunteers themselves.

So the big thing for me is that it's not creating work for volunteers. It always does, there's no question about that, but so there's not having all our volunteers rushing around in the days leading up to it, to this great big event where they come in, they feel wonderful about themselves because they've painted half the fence in the time available and gone away. (Community Manager 2)

Finding suitable volunteering opportunities that fit within the short time-frames of one day projects and were meaningful for both the community organisation and the volunteers presented significant challenges. All volunteers need a degree of training, particularly those volunteer positions that involve working directly with clients. For a number of community organisations the need for specific training and client privacy issues restricted the kinds of activities employee volunteers could be involved in. Some community organisations faced pressures to provide volunteering opportunities for large numbers of volunteers, often within tight time frames.

It was a big responsibility to make sure it was all ready and it was all going to happen and it was all sorted....the first time it felt like a huge responsibility. (Community Manager 3)

Trying to organise volunteering activities that meet community, business and employee needs was a key challenge. Some managers questioned whose needs were primary in the relationship and felt there were expectations that business demands often took priority. It was a case of the business helping out, but on its own terms. In addition community managers were wary of employee volunteering relationships that they felt could perpetuate traditional 'helper-helped' business community relationships, as one community manager commented:

Enthusiastic office workers that want to pat the ponies and help the 'poor unfortunates' not to mention ticking off their involvement in the community. Or worse 'we want a 'working-bee' like painting the clubhouse' – but it doesn't need it! (Community Manager 2)

Employee volunteering projects provided value-added benefits to community organisations. However, some community managers commented that the one day team volunteering model didn't always meet the most pressing volunteer needs of their organisations.

We don't have the types of programmes that necessarily straight away suit the corporate volunteering one day model which is what was suggested to us. And of course we're trying to figure out are there alternative ways of looking at that one day, but we don't have buildings that necessarily need painting and that sort of easily foreseen type of work. And also we have privacy issues and things that are difficult... (Community Manager 1)

Inadequate information sharing and communication between the business and community organisation was another issue. Interviews with many of the community managers indicated that their knowledge of businesses' CSR strategies, community involvement activities or specific volunteering opportunities and policies was very limited. There seemed to be limited opportunity for most community organisations to be involved in joint planning

of volunteering activities with the business and its employees. However, some community managers wanted opportunities to discuss with businesses how their organisation works and where their greatest volunteer needs were, prior to the volunteering activities taking place.

We're willing to work together on this, but let's brainstorm some ways that it can possibly workso trying to really manage that conversation, we really want to do it but we need to put some thought into it....(Community Manager 1)

Businesses wishing to leverage sponsorship relationships through employee volunteering can put significant pressure on community organisations. This is particularly the case if large numbers of employee volunteers are involved in volunteer activities across a number of different localities and on an on-going basis. If employee volunteering opportunities become tied in with sponsorship relationships volunteer managers can feel pressured to make sure the business needs through employee volunteering are met - 'we've got to work this out because it's our business sponsor'.

The biggest issue is that because we have a sponsorship relationship, I feel that there's a higher expectation that we will more readily be able to incorporate corporate volunteering into our way of doing things, our volunteering programmes. And I don't think that's necessarily the case. In fact I think it makes it more difficult because there is conflicting pressures. There's the pressure that we must do everything we can to ensure our sponsorship relationship. (Community Manager 1)

The importance of building internal understanding of the challenges of implementing such employee volunteering initiatives was stressed. On-going communication and information sharing within the community organisation between staff responsible for fundraising and sponsorships and those responsible for volunteer management were seen as vital.

Community organisations were responding to these challenges in varying ways. For example, two community organisations in this study offered services through a network of member groups or divisions throughout New Zealand. Both organisations worked with large numbers of employee volunteers from businesses in various localities throughout New Zealand. As employee volunteering became an increasingly important part of their work the community organisations were making internal changes to support employee volunteering on an on-going basis.

Rather than reacting in an ad-hoc way to business requests, the community organisations were endeavouring to take a planned approach. The community managers were adamant that employee volunteering initiatives need to add value to the work of the community organisation. And these benefits need to outweigh the associated costs. Assessing and clearly articulating the skills and expertise that the community organisation actually required was crucial, as one manager commented:

Don't be afraid to say 'no' – our work has a value and we should not be grateful for crumbs. (Community Manager 2)

Both community organisations had set-up internal forums to specifically discuss employee volunteering issues relating to their organisations. These forums provided opportunities for staff to discuss how employee volunteering might fit with the work of the organisation, what opportunities might be offered, benefits for the community organisation and the business partner; and possible resource implications. The forums provided important opportunities to consider initial misgivings staff might have about employee volunteering and resource issues, as involving employee volunteers could take up a lot of staff time.

Part of the internal preparation included the development of written policies specifically relating to employee volunteering. The policies were intended to assist divisions or member groups to establish effective working relationships with business and employee volunteers by outlining key expectations within the employee volunteering relationship. One community organisation had also developed a template to assist volunteer management procedures for one-off employee volunteering team events.

In contrast, it would appear that many small community organisations in this study had limited internal capacity to coordinate and manage employee volunteering initiatives. Few had managers dedicated to supporting volunteers. None had established specific goals for employee volunteering initiatives or developed written policies. However, these community organisations were nevertheless increasingly engaging with business through employee volunteering programmes. Despite the challenges associated with employee volunteering all community organisations in this study indicated they would work with volunteers from business again. In large part this was due to the advice and practical support community organisations received from local Volunteer Centres.

VOLUNTEER CENTRES AS EMPLOYEE VOLUNTEERING BROKERS

In considering the role of Volunteer Centres as employee volunteering brokers four issues are examined:

1. Reasons for Volunteer Centre involvement
2. What Volunteer Centres do
3. Benefits for community and business organisations working with Volunteer Centres
4. Challenges faced by Volunteer Centres

Reasons for Volunteer Centre involvement

A key purpose of Volunteer Centres is to support and promote volunteering. Volunteer Centres provide support at a local level for individual volunteers, groups of volunteers and volunteer involving organisations. The core functions of Volunteer Centres include brokerage of volunteering opportunities; marketing volunteering, good practice development, advocacy and campaigning for volunteering at a regional and sometimes national level.

Volunteer Centre managers in this study commented that employee volunteering fitted well with organisational goals to foster diversity within volunteering. Employee volunteering was perceived as providing important opportunities for meaningful engagement in the community, as the following comments suggest.

It's another pool of volunteers that people can access and once employee volunteers come and do one thing, they may not do anything else but then again they can get interested and it's just spreading the word among their networks and they're a whole different community of people. (Community Manager 5)

For a lot of them it's their very first foray into volunteering, I want them to be able to see what's out there and realise that they could be doing something outside work hours, off their own back. (Community Manager 7)

Another key reason for supporting employee volunteering was that it could enable community organisations to complete projects that might not otherwise get done.

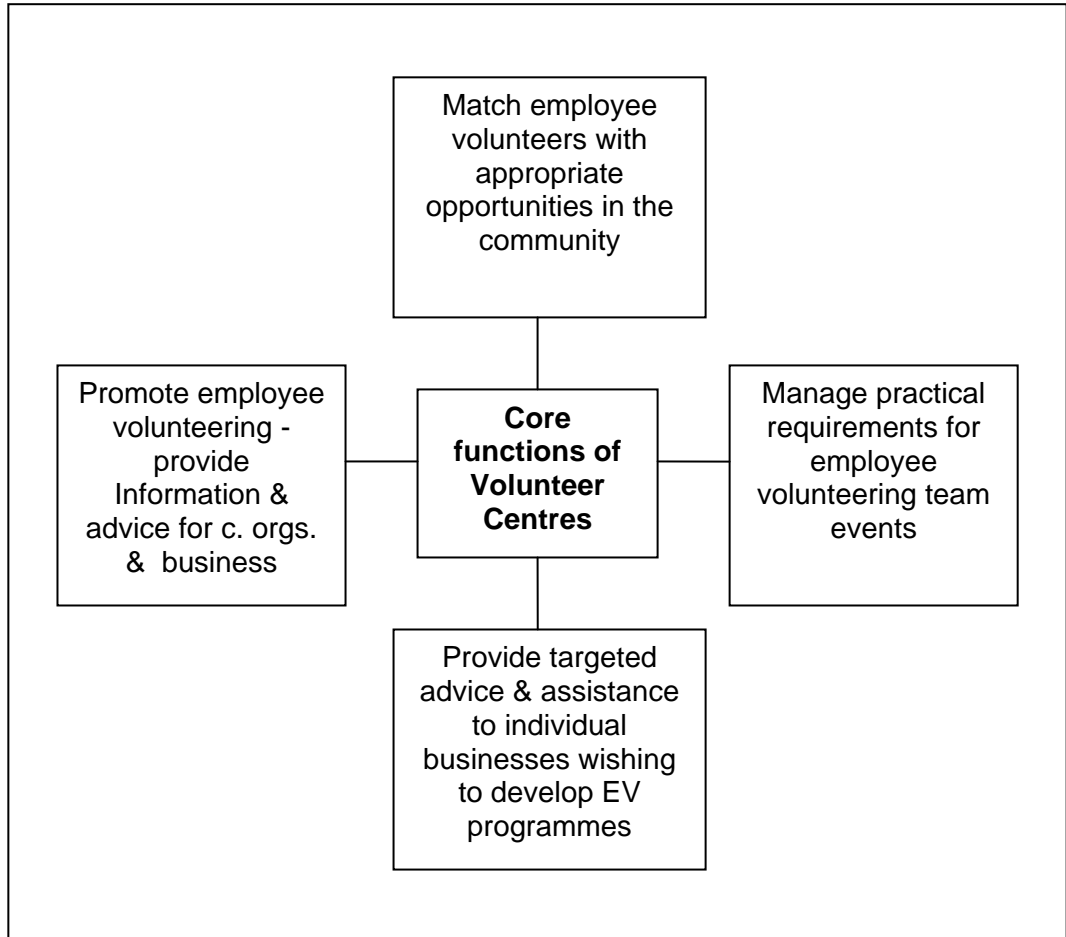
It's an extension of what the Volunteer Centre does with volunteering. It's the opportunity to get the bigger projects that may never get attended to. There's help for those. So it's supporting the member community organisations. (Community Manager 14)

For some Volunteer Centres in this study, being involved in employee volunteering had also helped the organisation to raise its own profile and reputation. For example, in 2007 one Volunteer Centre had been awarded a Department of Conservation Award for its work supporting employee volunteering in environmental projects in the Wellington region.

What Volunteer Centres do

In this study Volunteer Centres played a key role in encouraging and facilitating employee volunteering initiatives. Volunteer Centres worked with employee volunteers in two key ways – brokering team events and individual employee volunteering opportunities. Team events were overwhelmingly the most popular. Figure 3 summarises the core functions of Volunteer Centres in relation to employee volunteering initiatives.

Figure 3



Brokerage was a primary function performed by all five Volunteer Centres - matching groups and individual employees interested in volunteering with appropriate opportunities in the community. In essence brokerage involved Volunteer Centre managers working to define the employee volunteering needs of interested businesses. The Volunteer Centre managers would then work with community organisations to find suitable volunteering projects that the business might be interested in.

Key issues in brokerage were making a good match and working towards mutual benefit for the community organisation, employee volunteers and the business, as one employee volunteering co-ordinator commented:

I would describe my role as a match-maker - thinking through what their objectives are and what jobs they may be really interested in... I see the role as being the in-between one which brings the two together and points out the areas of mutual benefit and, I suppose, mutual things that they then can clasp onto and get them to meet each other. Get them to talk. Get them to explain where they're coming from. (Community Manager 4)

However, the extent of the brokering services offered varied considerably between the Volunteer Centres. For example, three of the Volunteer Centres in this study did not have staff specifically dedicated to managing employee volunteering initiatives. Managers were responsible for organising employee volunteering initiatives in addition to a range of other Centre responsibilities. Often the matching process involved business organisations indicating to the Volunteer Centre how many volunteers they had available, preferred types of projects, and time availability. The businesses would then be sent a list of potential volunteering projects to choose from. Once the 'match' was made it was over to the business and the community organisation concerned to manage the practical requirements of the project. The three Volunteer Centres offered relatively limited support for specific team projects.

In contrast, two Volunteer Centres had dedicated employee volunteering co-ordinators that were able to provide targeted advice and assistance to individual businesses. They had also extensive involvement in managing team employee volunteering events. For example, brokerage could include working with senior management to identify the employee volunteers' aims and volunteer desires; tailoring volunteering opportunities to the needs of employees; making presentations to staff; facilitating and managing the pre-event preparation; offering support, information and guidance – including risk assessment and health & safety advice; providing support on the day of the team project; arranging appropriate media coverage; and organising certificates and/or letters of appreciation. To perform these various functions effectively employee volunteering co-ordinators were required to have good connections across the community, business and public sectors, knowledge and experience of working across sectors and strong project management skills.

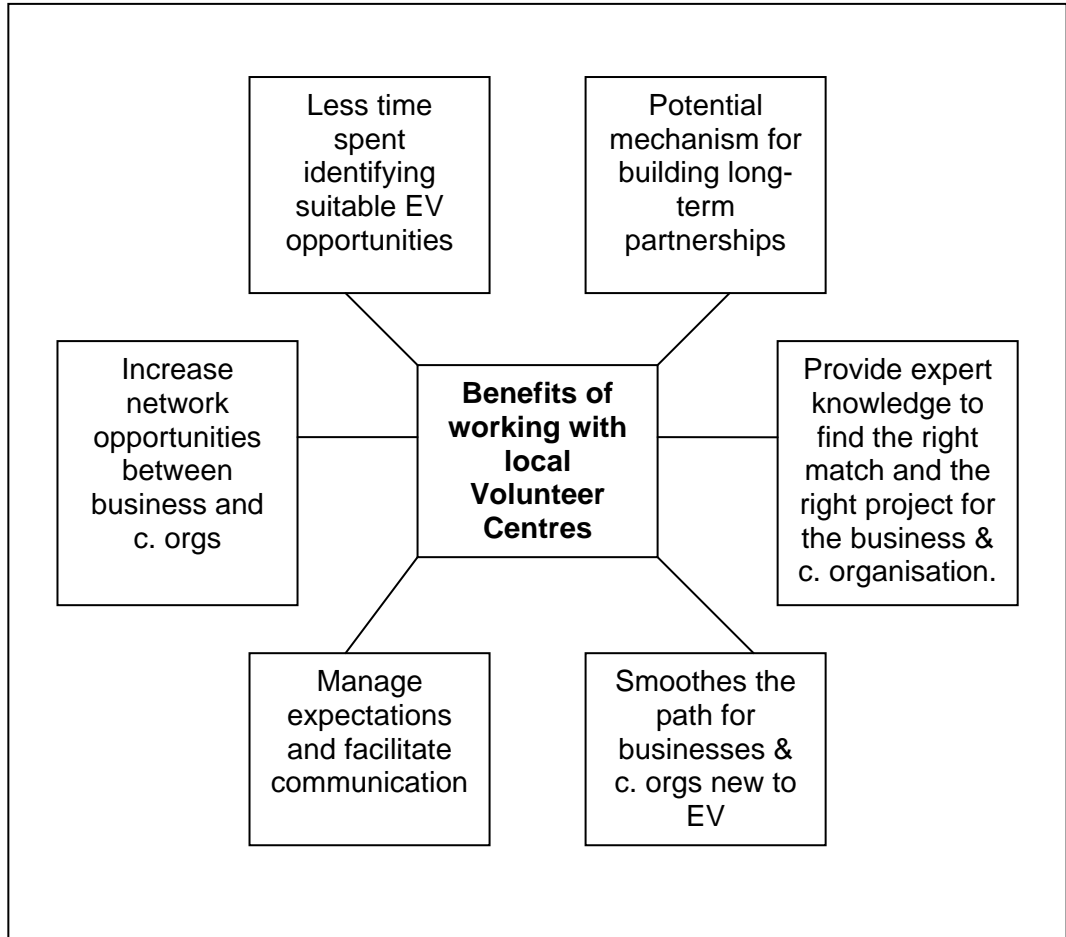
The Volunteer Centres were also involved in activities designed to raise community sector awareness of employee volunteering. For example, Volunteer Centres ran training workshops to assist community organisations considering working with business organisations. Training workshops provided sessions on key topics such as 'why work with business?' and 'how to do it?' Often these sessions were supported with speakers from community and business organisations that had experience with employee volunteering.

Some of the Volunteer Centres had developed brochures and/or booklets on employee volunteering. These outlined the benefits of employee volunteering for community organisations, employers and employees; types of employee volunteering opportunities available (individual volunteering, team projects, Board involvement, mentoring); services offered by the Volunteer Centre; and case studies of the types of team events that had been done in the past. Two Volunteer Centres also publicised employee volunteering and provided resources on employee volunteering through their websites. One Volunteer Centre had a regular newsletter dedicated to telling the varied stories and experiences of those involved in employee volunteering. Another Volunteer Centre had developed a promotional DVD show-casing some local employee volunteering case studies.

Benefits of working with a Volunteer Centre

Many business and community managers talked of the benefits they experienced through working with local Volunteer Centres. These benefits are summarised in Figure 4.

Figure 4



Business and community organisations often have limited time, resources and experience to explore employee volunteering opportunities. Many comments from business managers indicated the significant value added by Volunteer Centre brokers:

It's excellent being able to deal with one person. X was really really good to deal with - she'd tell me the hours she was going to be in the office. She'd always come back to my emails within X time. She provided us information. I mean dealing with her was just by and large the easiest part of it. (Business Manager 10)

It's all that organising, just really just takes it away from me doing it and I just think it works really well. So I do actually think they play an important part because they can kind of manage the corporates and then they can bring them and then push them back into the various organisations. (Business Manager 1)

Volunteer Centres have strong connections within the community sector and a good understanding of potential local volunteering opportunities. In this study Volunteer Centres were seen as providing expert local knowledge of identified volunteering needs to help find the right match and the right project for the business and community organisations concerned. This knowledge was of considerable benefit to business organisations, as one business manager commented:

Since we linked up with the Volunteer Centre, the ability to make those things happen is much easier now. It is very difficult if you are in a corporate activity to identify the opportunities to go and volunteer, you may just get yourself channelled into one area. Whereas if I go through someone like the local Volunteer Centre and I say, I have got a group, they will do whatever, I get three or four completely different things back and the team can choose what they want to do. (Business Manager 4)

The support and guidance provided by Volunteer Centres was particularly important for businesses that had little, if any, previous experience with employee volunteering, as the following comments indicate:

First of all we wouldn't have gone to X (a small local c. org) because I am pretty sure if I went around the room and said chuck a name in, I don't think anyone would have come up with X, it wouldn't have even crossed people's mind. I think they play an important role as that kind of umbrella organisation to bring all those organisations into one area. (Business Manager 1)

It's definitely connecting us with people who want our assistance because until we got going with them we were pretty much floundering around a bit and it's been a really good kick start for us. It's just really easy because they give us the opportunities and then all we have to do is turn up. (Business Manager 6)

Community organisations often have limited capacity to work with teams of employee volunteers. Volunteer Centres can help make the process easier, as one community manager commented:

They just did it all. They approached us. They organised businesses. They liaised. They told us what's happening. They checked up. But it just eased the whole thing, totally, and she had a system and she followed it and she knew the people and knew how to go about it. I'm not sure I'd try and do it myself so much, cos I can see how you do it properly and I'm already a volunteer. (Community Manager 3)

Working with local Volunteer Centres also provided opportunities to open up new networks for both business and community organisations. There were many examples in this study of small, local community organisations that had opportunities to work with employee volunteers for the first time, primarily because of their connections with local Volunteer Centres.

That's right up front in our information material. 'We can connect you with 360 organisations and people'. And that gaining of knowledge I think is an important thing. Who knows amongst all their families (in reference to employee volunteers) who might want some sort of community support. (Community Manager 13)

Employee volunteering relationships are complex, involving three key stakeholders – community organisations, employees, and business. Often the stakeholders will have different and sometimes conflicting needs and expectations. Volunteer Centres helped to manage potential differences and minimise potential negative outcomes. Establishing clear communication processes helped to clarify expectations and responsibilities for all parties involved. For example, some Volunteer Centres used formal agreements that were signed by the business and community managers to clarify expectations and responsibilities for parties involved in the employee volunteering project. Both community and business managers appreciated this:

Well when I first saw it (the employee volunteering agreement), I thought my goodness, what have I got myself in for. But by the second one it was like, oh yeah, I've seen that before. And I guess it means that everybody's clear about what's expected and what your responsibilities are and who's going to do what. (Community Manager 3)

It was really good because it set out exactly what we needed to do. It also set out what we needed to bring and it was a pretty clear illustration of what they were expecting from us. And that was really useful. (Business Manager 10)

Challenges for Volunteer Centres

Managers commented on the need for considerable preparatory work before establishing an employee volunteering programme. For example, one Volunteer Centre undertook a comprehensive scoping exercise to assess the feasibility of establishing a regional employee volunteering programme. The scoping work included establishing a working party that met regularly to discuss key issues and monitor progress; conducting research with key stakeholders (including local community and business sector representatives) to assess the climate for the uptake of employee volunteering and developing resources to support the programme.

We wanted something that was local and suitable for our culture if you like....we felt it important when we started to be really well based and we were. (Community Manager 5)

Building organisational capacity for undertaking an employee volunteering programme was a critical challenge for all Volunteer Centres in this study. All of the Volunteer Centres commented on the pressures of working with rapidly growing numbers of employee volunteers, as the following comments illustrate:

I guess it's just getting enough time to do it. Really it's virtually a full-time job. (Community Manager 4)

There's been huge growth. And I'm the one that has to do it all on top of everything else I have to do. We don't have a paid person to do it. (Community Manager 7)

The position of Volunteer Centres in New Zealand is typical of many organisations in the community sector where funding is often tenuous. This situation means that Volunteer Centre Boards need to carefully consider these constraints when assessing the viability of developing an employee volunteering programme. Managers argued that a key mechanism to build organisational capacity was to employ a paid staff member to manage and oversee the employee volunteering programme. The managers of Volunteer Centres that had a dedicated paid employee volunteering co-ordinator spoke highly of the benefits, as the following comment illustrates:

They make it happen. It's important that the relationships are good. So they ensure the relationship development really. They maximise it.... Do they understand the voluntary sector any better? Do they understand the community? Has the relationship been developed? I think that's the key. (Community Manager 13)

And those that didn't have a paid co-ordinator wanted one.

We want the pictures and the stories of the projects so we can build a business case to be able to apply for funding from the likes of the Trusts, the Foundations.... and that's what we're working on now, building a business case to put to some of these Foundations to fund the project, so that we can keep it free for their staff, but we have a paid person running it. We need a paid person desperately. I'm exhausted from it. I still have to do all my other jobs. (Community Manager 7)

However, finding ways to resource employee volunteering programmes was a key challenge for all the Centres. Who should pay for the services the Volunteer Centre provides in relation to employee volunteering was an ongoing topic of considerable debate. A key challenge was for the Volunteer Centre to both clarify what services it was able to provide and to persuade business of the value that the brokering role could provide.

One Volunteer Centre required a business to join as a financial member of the Centre before they could access employee volunteering services. This funding stream partially helped to cover costs of running the employee volunteering services. However, the remaining four Volunteer Centres were more reluctant to charge the businesses involved. Employee volunteering initiatives were funded from existing Centre resources ie money from Trusts, Foundations, grants etc. Some felt that the business contributed through volunteering while others felt that imposing a charge might put up potential barriers to participation in volunteering.

Some Volunteer Centres found that working with SMEs had initially presented some challenges. With SMEs describing their staffing levels as 'very lean' and limited knowledge of employee volunteering it had been challenging to get SMEs involved.

The first two or three years it was really hard slog.... And it's mainly because we don't have the Head Offices (of businesses). And we don't have the big employers. Our businesses are nearly all medium to small. So it's been really hard work. I think it's paying off well and truly. But it still needs continual work on it. And if you didn't have a paid person doing it, I just don't know what would happen really. (Community Manager 5)

Another key issue was finding ways to encourage community organisations to become involved in employee volunteering. Some managers felt that considerable preparatory work was required within the community sector before they could work with employee volunteers, particularly around establishing sound volunteer management practices.

We have to make sure that all things we need are in place, that the community organisations will support the volunteers. I have to say that some community organisations have not always done very well supporting the volunteers. (Community Manager 5)

Finding suitable projects that met the needs of the community organisation, the employees and the business was an on-going challenge. Some comments suggested community organisations were not always aware of what projects might suit business needs.

I've talked with community groups about a job that is huge. You couldn't do it in a day and you're expecting this team to do it in a day. Their expectation is sometimes a bit out of whack. (Community Manager 7)

Other comments indicated the stresses of organising volunteering opportunities that sometimes seemed to primarily suit business needs. Comments suggested that there can be tensions between meeting business and employee needs while ensuring that volunteering projects contribute meaningfully to local community agendas.

You've got to keep having new things. They don't want to do the same things. They want something different. They want a bit of a challenge. And it's getting harder and harder to find new things. So that is an ongoing task. (Community Manager 5)

The Volunteer Centres in this study were at different stages of development with employee volunteering initiatives. A key on-going challenge facing all Volunteer Centres is the need to develop the organisational capacity to enhance employee volunteering experiences for all involved. The organisational capacity required involves much more than obtaining financial resources to fund employee volunteering programmes. Capacity building includes developing the necessary sets of skills, attitudes, values and expertise to work effectively with both business and community organisations.

A future opportunity for Volunteer Centres with dedicated employee volunteering programmes is to move from primarily managing volunteering projects to working collaboratively with business and community organisations to develop an assortment of good practice resources eg project tools, case studies, good practice models, sample employee volunteering policy statements, monitoring/evaluation tools to measure impacts, promotional materials to aid senior management buy-in and staff participation, and other useful information to help get volunteering off to the best start.

Conclusions

The purpose of the study described in this report was to examine employee volunteering from community perspectives, as well as the business involved. In particular this research examined how employee volunteering programmes are managed, including the benefits and challenges for both business and community organisations. This research found that:

1. Business-centred benefits accruing from employee volunteering included improved staff satisfaction and morale; team building and greater internal cohesion; improved understanding of community issues and enhanced reputation and business profile.
2. Business organisations also faced a number of challenges in implementing employee volunteering initiatives. Key challenges included finding interesting and meaningful volunteer opportunities; barriers to staff participation; on-going communication and promotion of volunteering opportunities; limited middle management buy-in; tensions between soliciting employee input and ownership of the programme whilst also moving the programme towards meeting strategic business needs; and monitoring and measuring impacts. Some managers also indicated that one of their major challenges was the lack of information and examples of best practice in employee volunteering in New Zealand.
3. Business responses to these challenges varied. Some of the responses, of large businesses in particular, included developing a more strategic focus by linking employee volunteering with broader CSR or sustainability goals of the business; having written policies and procedures to ensure the sustainability of the programme; providing resources to assist internal and external coordination and liaison; involving employees in planning and management; supporting local employee volunteering 'champions' who help to coordinate employee volunteering activities at a branch level; working with brokers who understand the community sector eg Volunteer Centres.
4. Employee volunteering provided community organisations opportunities to complete projects; raise organisation profile and awareness of community issues; and develop new relationships and broaden networks.
5. A key challenge for community organisations was developing the organisational capacity to manage employee volunteering initiatives eg developing internal understanding of employee volunteering and possible business drivers; having staff available to coordinate initiatives; having volunteering opportunities that suit business needs, as well as those of the community organisation. Community organisations also commented that greater information sharing and communication about employee volunteering and CSR strategies in general would significantly aid cross-sector liaison and coordination.
6. Volunteer Centres played an important role in facilitating employee volunteering projects. Volunteer Centres provided expert local knowledge to help find the right match and the right project for the business and community organisations concerned. A key on-going challenge facing all Volunteer Centres is the need to develop the

organisational capacity to enhance employee volunteering experiences for all involved.

Results from this study indicate there are four key challenges involved in developing effective employee volunteering initiatives. Firstly, employee volunteering experiences that lead to the best possible outcomes for both community organisations and businesses require all parties to participate for the mutual benefits for all. Being open about motives, clarifying expectations and recognising the need for mutual value are key considerations. Secondly, effective employee volunteering programmes require reciprocity - the need for on-going commitment and reliability of both the business and community participants. Thirdly, employees and community organisations, in addition to senior business management, need to be actively involved in decision-making processes. Businesses and community organisations bring different strengths, skills and needs. Participatory communication processes will help trusting employee volunteering relationships to develop and increase mutual understanding. Lastly, capacity building in both sectors is a priority. Establishing working relationships between sometimes disparate partners necessitates some change in attitudes, values and behaviour. Effective employee volunteering programmes call for both business and community organisations to develop the knowledge, skills, attributes and resources to meet the demands of cross-sector collaboration.

This research is an initial effort to understand how employee volunteering programmes are managed and how relational and organisational issues can influence effective employee volunteering relationships. The issues identified in this report need to be supplemented by further research. In particular further research is needed to explore the perspectives of the employee volunteers who are directly involved in volunteering projects.