



FACTSHEET

VOLUNTEERING DURING THE COVID-19 OUTBREAK

APRIL 2020

Employee volunteering is a crucial part of any responsible business strategy. The benefits include increased employee engagement, better employee wellbeing, retention and recruitment of talent, and learning and development opportunities.

Furthermore, strategic volunteering, aligned to your core business and utilising employee's skills, creates lasting impact in the community.

COVID-19 has resulted in postponing or cancelling traditional 'face-to-face' volunteering. However, this is an opportunity for businesses to rethink how they deliver ongoing support.

For example, working with your charity partner to offer new, skills-based capacity building roles, or moving established programmes online.

Contributing to the crisis response through your core business can result in greater business benefits.

Steps you can take

1. Review your volunteering policy

Remove limits on volunteering days and make volunteering time unlimited dependant on discussion with line managers. If a member of your team can make a significant contribution to the COVID-19 response effort, support them to do so. Free up any staff who have experience working with the military or in health care to offer their skills for the time being by putting them on [Emergency Volunteering Leave](#).

Although guidance stipulates that staff on a job retention scheme (furlough) cannot provide services for their employer including volunteering, do encourage them to volunteer for other organisations.

2. Speak to your charity partners

Do not assume that your charity partners have ceased service delivery. Have a conversation with them about what they need and prioritise their requirements over your volunteering needs. Find out if there are ways to contribute to services being delivered safely and remotely.

3. Think about how you can contribute to the crisis response through your core business

This will often be more valuable than any volunteering you undertake and may result in greater business benefits through employee engagement and wellbeing, as well as customer loyalty.





4. Highlight the stories

Share what your employers are doing to make a difference in their homes, communities, or a wider capacity.

5. Now may not be the time for employee volunteering

Think about what your community is going to look like as it moves into the recovery phase of the crisis. Prepare for a strategic community investment approach when the time is right.

“I am delighted to see organisations innovate and flex their offer such as St James’s Place Wealth Management. They have removed their limit on volunteering to unlimited days, which has freed up staff who used to work in the military or NHS. They are also supporting employees to fundraise at home and deliver desk-based volunteering.”

- Jodie Cross, Community Adviser, Business in the Community

Things to consider

- At this time, volunteering must be based on a needs-led approach. The requirements of people in the community are more important than your business volunteering requirements.
- Charities and community organisations need funding more than they need volunteers right now.¹ Supporting your employees to fundraise from their homes through sponsored exercise, crafting or mindfulness may have a much greater impact than feet on the ground. Employee volunteers can host fundraising events (from home) on behalf of charity partners, or research

funding opportunities and support in putting together grant or loan applications.

- Practicalities insist you support your employees to volunteer where they are based. Suggest they reach out to the local causes they’re already connected to – schools, care homes, neighbourhood groups or local charity groups.
- Consider your employees as your own community – do you have any resources or expertise that you usually share in the community which would make your employee’s lives easier right now, such as education programmes to support all your employee parents who are teaching their children from home?
- It turns out we can accomplish much more online than we realised. You could consider moving your volunteering online, but only if it makes sense and will add real value to your community or charity partners. Check what’s already available and whether you’ll be able to reach the people who most need your support.
- Small businesses are part of your community. Now might be the time to think about how your employee skills and expertise can support small businesses in your industry to stay afloat.
- You need to be in it for the long run. Communities will take many years to recover from the health and economic impacts of this crisis. Think about how you are going to intervene both now, but also over the longer term.

Case study

When COVID-19 disrupted the delivery of Business in the Community’s (BITC) flagship employability programme **Ready for Work**, the team in Manchester was quick to set up a virtual job club for past and present participants. The programme supports those with significant barriers to work to

¹ www.institute-of-fundraising.org.uk/news/coronavirus-impact-survey-results-charities-cannot-meet-the/





gain and sustain employment. In recent weeks, as the labour market shifted through a tumultuous period, it became clear that demand for support to navigate the labour market had increased.

This would not have been possible without the rapid rallying of business volunteers from **Kier Group**, **The Co-operative Bank**, **Bollington**, **Bruntwood** and the **Cabinet Office**. Laptops have also been donated through BITC's **National Business Response Network**. This demonstrates the value of reaching out to your community partners to see what services they are running and how your business can support them. [Read more about the setting up of the virtual Ready for Work job club.](#)

The legal part

- Safeguarding vulnerable people becomes more important, not less during times of crisis. Revisit your safeguarding policy and make sure you are not putting anyone at risk. [Read the official volunteer safeguarding advice from the government.](#)
- Employees on job retention schemes (furlough) cannot provide services or make money for (or on behalf of) their employer. This includes volunteering. They can, however, volunteer for a different organisation.²
- In response to the ongoing crisis, the government has created a temporary new form of statutory unpaid leave for employees who wish to volunteer – Emergency Volunteering Leave. Certain rights and protections for employees and workers must be protected, such as the maintenance of terms and conditions of employment, and protection from detriment for taking leave. A compensation scheme is also being set up to compensate

eligible volunteers for some loss of income. [Read more information on eligibility.](#)

Useful links

- [NHS Volunteer Responders](#) has temporarily paused recruitment as they process the original round of 750,000 volunteers. There are expectations that these roles will increase in clarity and demand over time. Support any colleagues who have applied to continue volunteering after they are back in the workplace and encourage others to join once recruitment resumes.³
- [Volunteer Centres](#) are organisations across the UK that provide expertise and support within the community. These are established organisations with long-built connections to charities and community organisations.
- BITC's [National Business Response Network](#) is collating requests for help from charities and community organisations across the UK. It is matching requests for volunteers with relevant business employees as and when they come in. View [requests from community organisations](#) to see if you can help.
- [Volunteering Matters](#) has been leading UK volunteering in policy and practice for more than 50 years. They are also matching volunteers to community requests and have additional guidance for volunteering during a lockdown.

Further support

If you would like more information about how BITC can support your business to have an impact in communities or support you to put new volunteering interventions in place, please contact Belinda.Goodman@bitc.org.uk to discuss the benefits of a community partnership.

² More information from NCVO on volunteering and furloughing available at <https://blogs.ncvo.org.uk/2020/04/08/volunteering-and-furloughing-what-do-we-know/>

³ NHS Volunteer Responders paused recruitment on 29 March 2020 and were still paused at 14 April 2020.

