

9 Things Charities Want Companies to Know About Asking to Volunteer

Requests for 100 employee volunteer spots in a single day.

Looking for some way to pitch in... next week.

Volunteers keen to plant trees, without a budget for supplies.

Community organizations get a lot of requests from companies looking for volunteer opportunities for their employees – some get dozens of offers of support monthly. While always well-intentioned, sometimes company requests are simply not possible to meet, and put the community organization under stress.

“There is a concern that saying we can’t absorb this number of volunteers, or I’m sorry there isn’t enough time to plan, the company will never come back, or worse, will pull their support if they are a donor,” shared a participant at a gathering in March 2017 of charity representatives, hosted by [Volunteer Toronto](#).

Here are some of the things community organizations would like companies – including employee groups and departments who are self-organizing – to know to ensure a positive experience for employees and the community they want to support:

1. **Have flexibility** – Especially around dates. And be open to volunteer tasks you haven’t thought of.
2. **Lots of lead time** – Please make your requests no later than two months before your ideal event date in order to ensure proper planning.
3. **Even more lead time for working with youth and vulnerable populations** – Volunteers need police checks and vulnerable sector screening to work with kids, seniors, persons with disabilities, etc. It can take up to 4 months to get these and there are fees to process. The good news: once employees have these checks done, they are often good for a year or more.
4. **There aren’t many opportunities for groups of more than 20** – For some organizations, 10 is really their max to make sure volunteers have something useful to do to advance the organization’s mission. If you have larger groups, plan to split them up and approach several charities.

5. **Donors, please be aware** – If it wasn't in the donor agreement, an employee volunteer event isn't guaranteed. Let's have a conversation about what's possible!
6. **Budget** – Volunteering opportunities cost community organizations in terms of both supplies and staff time. Be prepared to discuss the costs with your community partner and be willing to cover.
7. **Ensure employees reaching out are aware of corporate policies** – Community organizations are seeing an uptick in requests from employees representing their department or employee resource groups (rather than requests coming through the CSR or Public Affairs team). This initiative is terrific and companies support these keen organizers by ensuring that volunteering policies (e.g. on budget, health and safety, etc.) are shared widely in companies.
8. **Consider a longer-term commitment** – Some amazing transformational opportunities happen with ongoing volunteer roles for employees, such as mentoring or sharing skills like marketing, accounting, etc. Speak with community organizations about creative ways to support them over time.
9. **If not this time, come again** – If a community organization says your volunteer request doesn't fit their needs or capacity at this time, ask them about what would be a better fit and plan to chat with them again the next time employees are looking for a way to give back.

For more guidance on creating corporate-community partnerships, read [The Canadian Code for Employer Supported Volunteering](#).

For examples of companies leading the way in employer-supported volunteering, read [Leading with Intention: Employer-Supported Volunteering in Canada](#).