Corporate Responsibility and Employee Volunteer Programs

Introduction

Employee Volunteer Programs (EVP) have become an integral part of many Corporate Responsibility (CR) initiatives. On the surface, it seems only natural to engage employees in a business's efforts to demonstrate its commitment to being a responsible corporate citizen. At the same time, effectively incorporating EVP into CR efforts is hardly an easy task. This dynamic creates an opportunity to further explore the reasons behind CR professionals taking on EVP efforts and gaining a better understanding of the challenges and opportunities presented by such combined undertakings.

Junior Achievement (JA) is one of the world's leading nonprofit economic education organizations. Our programs promote concepts related to financial literacy, work readiness, and entrepreneurship to more than 4.8 million students in grades K-12 each year. JA's programs are delivered by nearly a quarter-of-a-million volunteers, primarily through Employee Volunteer Programs. For this reason, we conducted the research presented in this document to gain a better understanding of how CR professionals use EVP programs.
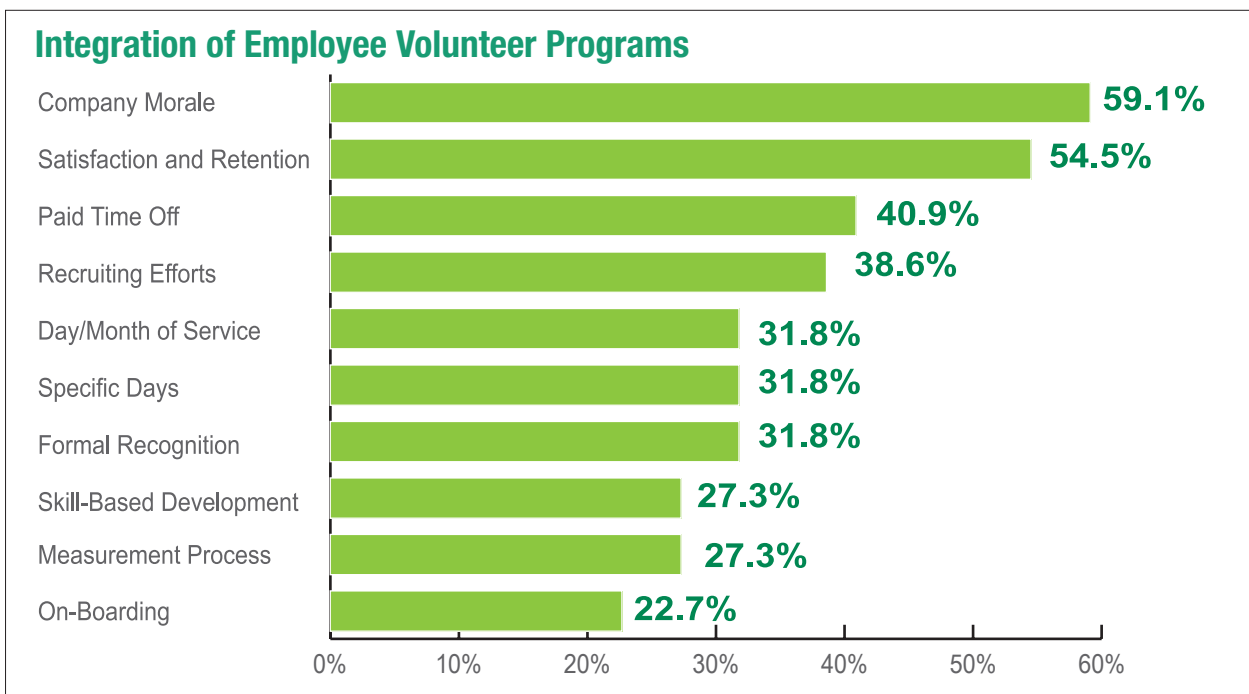
Findings

To gain a greater understanding of how CR professionals' view EVP programs, JA enlisted the help of SharedXpertise Media, a leader in the Corporate Responsibility field, to conduct a survey of more than 100 CR professionals. The intent of the survey was to find out what percentage of companies use EVP programs as part of their Corporate Responsibility efforts, how the programs are integrated into an organization, what challenges occur when implementing EVP, and where responsibility falls within an organization for EVP oversight. The survey was conducted in January and February of 2017.

Companies with Employee Volunteer Programs

Of the respondents to the survey, 85.4 percent said that their companies use Employee Volunteer Programs as part of their CR efforts, compared to 14.6 percent who did not. This level of use further underscores the importance of employee volunteers being connected to Corporate Responsibility efforts.

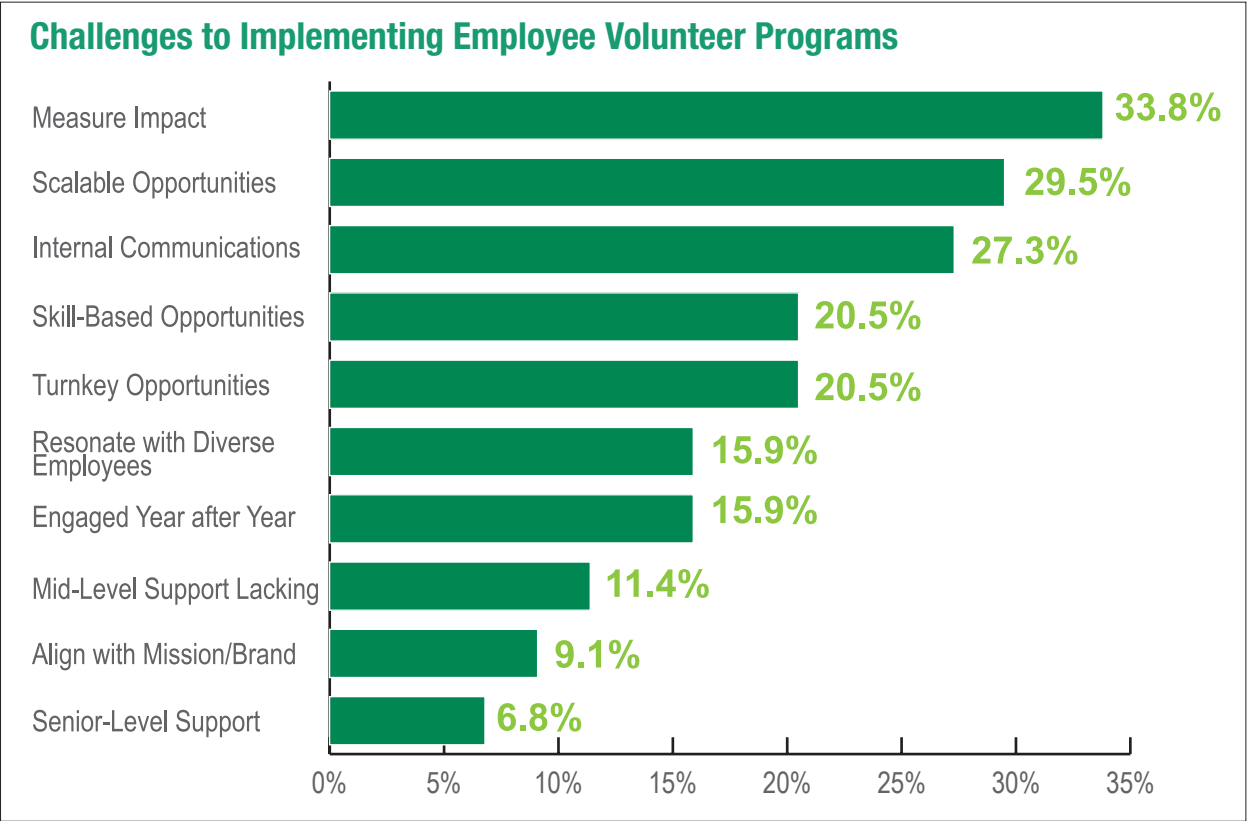### Ways Volunteer Programs are integrated into an Organization

Respondents were then asked, "How does your company integrate employee volunteer programs throughout the culture of your organization?" Nearly 6-in-10 (59.1%) said they encourage volunteering in groups to enhance

Integration of Employee Volunteer Programs

Category	Percentage
Company Morale	59.1%
Satisfaction and Retention	54.5%
Paid Time Off	40.9%
Recruiting Efforts	38.6%
Day/Month of Service	31.8%
Specific Days	31.8%
Formal Recognition	31.8%
Skill-Based Development	27.3%
Measurement Process	27.3%
On-Boarding	22.7%

company morale. Just over half (54.5%) saw these programs as a way to increase employee satisfaction and retention. Approximately 4-in-10 (40.9%) noted that they gave associates paid time off to volunteer. Corporate Responsibility professionals also promoted their volunteer efforts as part of their employee recruiting (38.6%), organized days or months of service with nonprofit partners (31.8%), or tied skills-based volunteering with professional development plans (27.3%).

Challenges with Implementing Employee Volunteer Programs

Survey participants were then asked to identify challenges faced when implementing an Employee Volunteer Program. One-in-three (33.8%) said the greatest challenge was measuring the impact of their efforts. This was followed by nearly as many (29.5%) saying that finding opportunities that were scalable to include most or all interested employees was the biggest challenge. Maintaining internal communications about opportunities for employees (27.3%), finding opportunities that fit within the available time frame (27.3%), and identifying appropriate skills-based opportunities, were also challenging.

Challenges to Implementing Employee Volunteer Programs

Challenge	Percentage
Measure Impact	33.8%
Scalable Opportunities	29.5%
Internal Communications	27.3%
Skill-Based Opportunities	20.5%
Turnkey Opportunities	20.5%
Resonate with Diverse Employees	15.9%
Engaged Year after Year	15.9%
Mid-Level Support Lacking	11.4%
Align with Mission/Brand	9.1%
Senior-Level Support	6.8%

Responsibility for Leading Employee Volunteer Offerings

By and large, Corporate Responsibility professionals saw themselves as taking the lead in driving employee volunteer efforts, with 40.6 percent saying responsibility for these efforts fell under them. Next, 15.6 percent responded that the responsibility fell under a C-Suite executive at their company, while 12.5 percent said it was overseen by the HR/Training department.

Application

While the research shows that Employee Volunteer Programs are a critical part of Corporate Responsibility efforts, this leads to the consideration of how CR professionals can help ensure the success of these efforts. As noted in the findings, there are considerable challenges that must be overcome to successfully implement employee volunteer initiatives, ranging from measuring impact and scalability to whether or not the effort aligns with the company's mission

and has the necessary support from senior leadership. Before embarking on an Employee Volunteer Program, or just revisiting what is currently being done, JA recommends asking these following questions:

Why Is This Being Done?

Is the goal of the Employee Volunteer Program to build an organizational culture that makes associates feel that they are part of something bigger? Is it an extension of the brand or organizational mission? Or is it something the company feels compelled to do because other organizations are doing it?

Starting with figuring out the "why?" of your effort is critical. If leadership doesn't have a clear idea of why an Employee Volunteer Program exists, the employees won't, either. Taking on the challenge of understanding the "why?" is important, but may also result in the need to revisit and revise core aspects of the Employee Volunteer Program.

Does This Make Sense for The Company's Mission or Brand?

The success of an Employee Volunteer Program can be determined by whether or not it makes sense in the eyes of employees. If an employer is in the food service space, does it make sense to clean a community park or build a hiking trail over providing meals for the homeless? Ensuring the program has a direct line of sight back to the organization's mission or brand will go a long way towards helping employees better understand why a particular cause was chosen.

Do Employees Feel A Sense Of Ownership?

Have employees had a chance to weigh in on the effort? People may feel like they are being told what to do because that's literally what is happening. Providing a chance for employees to suggest ways to engage with the community and organize the effort can give associates a sense of ownership, as well as the opportunity to be proud of what they have accomplished.

Is People's Time Being Used Well?

One of the benefits of working with nonprofit partners is that many have experience working with Employee Volunteer Programs. They can help ensure that associates have the materials and information they need before taking on a community project so they can feel valued and that their energy was well spent. At the same time, skills-based volunteering can be a challenge from a scalability standpoint. Finding a partner that can help all associates feel like they are contributing something can aid in ensuring the success of an employee volunteer program.

Addressing these questions in a thoughtful and inclusive way can help increase the value placed on your Employee Volunteer Program and make sure all parties involved experience the benefit.

To learn more about how JA assists companies with their Employee Volunteer Programs, visit www.ja.org.

Why JA?

Junior Achievement®

If your company is running Employee Volunteer Programs, JA is ready to work with you.

Learn how JA can help your company engage employees in your CR activities.