



# People or Profits – Why not both?

How volunteering can improve  
your business and community

The view from businesses in London

# Why don't you volunteer more?

Apologies, it's not an accusation it's a question. Maybe the answer is because you already support charities with money? Or perhaps you don't feel you have the skills required to help? Both are possible. But there is one reason that trumps the rest by a landslide: 'work commitments'.<sup>1</sup>

96% of organisations are either volunteering already or plan to in the next 2 years

We spend so much time slaving away at our desks that we don't have time to volunteer for others. Sure, it would be lovely to go and refurbish a local school playground, but – reality check – there's that presentation I need to finish that has to come first.

**The solution is clear; make volunteering part of your 'work commitments'. Volunteer through your company.**

But then come our capitalist doubts; 'businesses aren't interested in volunteering; they care about profits, not people.' It's the evil, power-hungry, tax-evading world of hard-nosed corporates. Or is it? Our study has found that those noses may be a little softer than you think.

In fact, two thirds (63%) of businesses say they've volunteered in the past 12 months and 89% of those who haven't, plan to in the next 2 years. Also 40% of those already volunteering say they're likely to do more over the next 12 months (with only 8% saying they might do less).

That's a lot of statistics but they all boil down into one rewarding figure. Almost all organisations (96%) already volunteer or plan to in the next 2 years. So much for the 'we-can't-help-the-homeless-we've-got-a-quarterly-target' theory.

However, whilst it is great that most businesses are either volunteering already or have plans to, that's a far cry from saying there is no room to improve – just because something is taking place doesn't mean it's efficient, effective or couldn't be better. After all, societal problems are still abundant – 1 in 5 people in the UK live below the poverty line<sup>2</sup> and the number of people sleeping rough in London has increased by 75% in the past 4 years.<sup>3</sup> This suggests there is plenty more that we could be doing.

In this report we seek to get to the bottom of how organisations can help bring about widespread improvements as we investigate the benefits, barriers and practicalities of volunteering, and discover that the real potential may not be quite where you'd expect.



**Carolyn Housman**  
CEO, Heart of the City

*'We find that 'internal drivers', such as employee engagement, are fundamental to why smaller businesses get involved in citizenship activities. Engaging employees on issues that reflect their own values, such as volunteering, is a key step towards increasing employee satisfaction – and thus the longer-term company benefit of employee retention.'*

## Methodology

*This report is based on interviews conducted online with 200 HR, CSR and volunteering decision makers in organisations across Greater London. Respondents represented a wide variety of businesses from SMEs to large corporates, across a range of industry sectors. The research took place during December 2014.*

# Improving the status quo

Broadly speaking there are 2 ways in which volunteering can be improved.

1. Getting companies to volunteer *more*
2. Getting companies to volunteer *better*

Of the companies that volunteer, only 4% say that 'all' employees are involved

## 1. Getting companies to volunteer more

One way to improve volunteering is by getting companies to volunteer *more*. This doesn't just mean getting more companies to volunteer – we've seen that most of them already do or plan to – but also getting more employees within each company to participate more frequently. Of the companies that currently volunteer, only 4% say that 'all' employees are involved and 42% say that 'less than half' are.

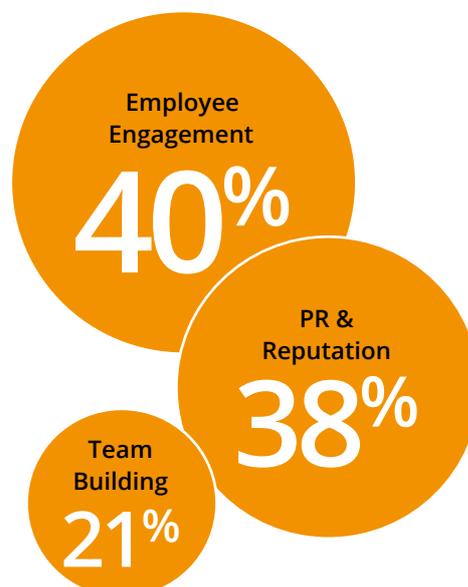


**Gordon McCullough**  
Chief Executive,  
Community Action  
Southwark

*'So how can business leaders facilitate volunteering in their company? Have a volunteering policy, assign a budget and create a positive culture around volunteering. Spread good news stories both internally and externally and lead by example. In our experience the most successful corporate volunteering programmes have significant buy in and support from the senior management team.'*

To raise levels though, we first need to understand what it is that businesses really get out of volunteering. Whilst those children at the local primary school will undoubtedly appreciate their new herb garden, what does it bring the company who put it there? We asked this question and there were three main things that came out:

### How has volunteering benefitted your organisation?



Number one; this will be quite evident to anyone who has witnessed the smiling faces of employees who have been unshackled from their desks. Allowing employees to get out of the office and do something different for the day increases motivation and engagement – not a bad goal as employee engagement is strongly correlated with business growth, customer loyalty, productivity and a whole host of other wonderful things. No wonder companies are so keen to get their hands dirty.

The next most prominent benefit quoted is **PR**. Volunteering clearly benefits employees wellbeing but there can also be more direct business impacts. Getting a couple of snaps of your staff standing proudly muddled next to the new community garden they've just renovated can't be bad for business can it?

The final benefit, similar to the first, is that volunteering encourages **team building**. Getting John from marketing and Claire from sales to plant a tree together doesn't just hone their horticultural ability, it also helps them learn how to tackle a problem and accomplish a job together. This team building has a knock-on impact on the company as employees mesh together and become more productive as a unit.

So there we have it, volunteering provides a whole host of benefits. It engages employees, it produces positive PR and it builds teams. If you want to encourage more volunteering, what more is there to say?

Well – let's pause just a minute – these may be the 'benefits' of volunteering but are they also the reason why businesses volunteer in the first place, a subtle but important difference?

The answer – not entirely. In actual fact, the main motivation for businesses getting involved in volunteering – cynics hold your tongues – is altruism. 'To help those in need' is seen as a motivation by more businesses than anything else. And half say their top motivation is either 'to help those in need', 'to support a cause close to us' or 'to help the local community'.



**Carolyn Housman**  
CEO, Heart of the City

*'Our own research echoes the finding that altruism is a key driver of volunteering. After 'culture/values', Heart of the City business members say that they start a CSR programme because 'it is the right thing to do!'*

*'One of the most significant barriers a business needs to overcome to increase the volume, quality and benefits of volunteering is securing the genuine endorsement of volunteering by senior management. Authentic support from business leaders is what causes genuine culture change where business practices align with employee values, enabling the employer to retain staff for longer whilst benefitting their local community.'*

So businesses really do care. They want to help. In that case, what's keeping the volunteering floodgates closed? What needs to happen to encourage the 33% who have plans to start volunteering to follow through with them, the 4% who don't have plans to put some in place and the 63% that already volunteer, to do it more often and with more employees?

The solution can come from both the charity side and the business side, but we'll start by looking from the charity perspective. We asked businesses what they thought charities could do to encourage more companies to volunteer and two broad themes were revealed.

- Improve communications
- Be more innovative and flexible

### 1a – What charities can do

The clear 'number one' thing that charities need to do is to improve their communications, with 77% of businesses mentioning this. Businesses want charities to come and meet them personally, to be clear about exactly what it is that the volunteering experience can offer and make sure there are tangible business benefits that are communicated simply. Even if a company's main motivation is altruism, being able to build a business case for volunteering will always sweeten the deal and may be essential if sign-off is needed from the board. Of course, all of this could get very time consuming for charities, especially smaller ones with limited resources. Finding an effective way to communicate – be that through a highly targeted approach or the use of partners/representatives is vital.

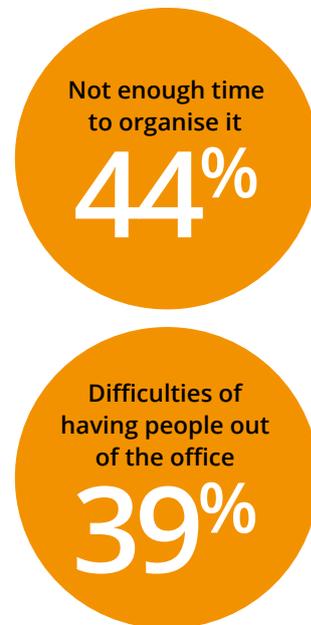
The second main theme, which 30% of businesses mentioned, is for charities to be **innovative and flexible** in the volunteering opportunities they offer. The ways in which businesses can currently volunteer with charities are felt to be too limited and rigid. Flexibility is needed both in terms of the type of support that can be offered (e.g. a range of activities that require varying skills) and in terms of availability. Businesses said they'd like employees to be able to volunteer at a time that suited them, be that in or out of working hours and that they should be able to volunteer individually on a regular basis if they so wish. In these ways, charities may become long-term strategic business partners rather than just 'asking for money and resources'.

### 1b – What businesses can do

So there's room for improvement from the charities point of view, but there are also internal barriers that businesses need to overcome. These barriers aren't so much bureaucratic or regulatory. Health and safety and political/cultural sensitivities are generally afterthoughts, to be sorted once other barriers have been overcome, and are only major obstacles to a small minority (only 6% and 7% respectively quote these are their biggest barrier). The same goes for lack of money and employee enthusiasm (only top barriers for 8% each).

No, the two 'overly-strict bouncers' in the 'nightclub of business volunteering' – the ones that are most commonly slamming the door in companies faces – are time and resource.

### Barriers to business volunteering?



Businesses may be inclined to volunteer, but they just don't know if they can manage it. Fortunately, there are things that they can do to bypass these troublesome doormen.

We've already seen how there's a desire for charities to become more flexible, but the business needs to be proactive too.

- Make it as easy as possible for employees to volunteer, by providing a range of options in or out of normal working hours
- Get dates in the diary as far in advance as possible – there will always be a reason why you can't volunteer tomorrow but 6 months in advance can be built around

47% say that working with a volunteering broker saves time and 41% say it reduces the amount of effort

- Allow a variety of formats in which employees can volunteer. If having multiple employees out of the office is a problem, perhaps volunteering individually or in small teams is the way forward.
- Businesses may also want to consider lightening the load by working with a volunteering broker. 85% said they saw benefits to working with brokers, primarily that it saves the amount of time they have to spend on management (47%) and it reduces the amount of effort they have to expend too (41%). Despite this though, only 16% actually use brokers. Could brokers be the untapped source that will allow businesses to volunteer without the hassle?

is just as important as quantity. How can we improve the efficacy of volunteering that is already going on? To answer this, we looked at 3 key questions.

- Are businesses volunteering in the areas where they perceive there is most need?
- Are businesses right about the areas that they believe are most in need?
- Are there any volunteering areas that are currently being neglected?

**a) Are businesses volunteering in the areas where they perceive there is most need?**

Although many businesses may have altruistic intentions, it may be that not all of them are actually volunteering in the areas in which they see the greatest need. If this is the case, business volunteering may not be as beneficial to the community as it could be.

Let's examine this by comparing the areas that businesses consider to be of most need versus the areas in which they are volunteering:

## 2. Getting companies to volunteer better

We've just looked at the quantity side of things – how to get more businesses and more employees volunteering – but quality



**Kate Cavelle,**  
Head of Pro Bono and  
Community Investment,  
Allen & Overy

*'Companies should not presume that a charity will jump at the chance for volunteers and have adequate resources/opportunities. Managing volunteers to make sure the interaction works for the company, the volunteers, the charity and its beneficiaries requires time, skill and insight – and often patience. Often money. This is why good brokers are so important as they understand the complexities.'*

Area	% who consider a top issue	% who have volunteered in last 2 years	Difference
Children's education/activities	40%	46%	+6%
Homelessness	37%	26%	-11%
Unemployment	35%	42%	+7%
Drug/alcohol addiction	32%	11%	-21%
Lack of support for older people	30%	29%	-1%
Community spaces/environment	24%	42%	+18%
Criminality	23%	13%	-10%
Refugees and asylum seekers	20%	11%	-9%
Healthcare	13%	19%	+6%



**Noa Burger,** Corporate Responsibility Manager, City of London Corporation

*'Some volunteering activities can be done on a rota basis to ensure that no individual is away from their desk for longer than can be managed. Having said that, if we accept that volunteering has business benefits, just as there are benefits to letting your staff go out on training, go to conferences, take annual leave, then time to volunteer should also be an acceptable reason to be out of the office.'*

*I would encourage all businesses to make use of brokers where possible, as they already have the knowledge, connections and templates on hand. Good brokers are so much more than just a phone book of community organisations. They have a clear view of the issues and needs in the community, and can think strategically about how your business' particular capabilities can add value to those issues, so that whatever you have to offer you know you're having maximum impact.'*

In some areas, perceived issues and volunteering do match up nicely. 'Children's education/activities' is both the area of most need and the area most volunteered in over the last 2 years. Similarly, unemployment is 2nd on the list of volunteering areas and 3rd in terms of local community issues. Beautiful.

Hang on though, there are some areas where problems and solutions don't match up. Homelessness is considered the 2nd biggest problem but few have worked with the homeless in the past 2 years and a third actively say they wouldn't want to do any volunteering in this area. A similar situation occurs in drug and

alcohol addiction. In contrast, 'community spaces/environment' is one of the highest volunteering areas despite being fairly low on the list of local issues.

An economist might say there's a serious dead-weight loss here – 'we could do better!'. Businesses may very well have the best interests of the community at heart but the evidence suggests that in a lot of cases – whether it be down to a lack of volunteering opportunities in some areas, a perceived lack of expertise on behalf of the employees or simply businesses looking to take the easy way out – they're not always fully meeting its needs.

A third of businesses say they would not want to volunteer with the homeless



**Gordon McCullough, Chief Executive, Community Action Southwark**

*The first question a business should ask in relation to their volunteering programme should be 'where can we make the greatest impact with the resources and time we have available', rather than coming with a predetermined idea of what those issues may be or which groups they should be working with.*

*Undertaking a project where the focus is more on the positive outcome/impact for the community rather than on a day out for the volunteer is ultimately more rewarding and impactful for both the volunteer and the community group.*

*Businesses should be encouraged to explore the communities in which they work and to look at where the real need within their community lies. This can be challenging, so engaging a broker who knows the local community and is able to advise them and identify suitable opportunities is worth exploring.*

*Needs are entirely varied and specific to each community. Some groups don't get as much support as they need including the elderly, ex-offenders and disability health charities to name a few.*

*The majority of businesses that involve – and other brokers - works with tend to broadly focus on the environment, employability and education (specifically in relation to young people), which, while aligning with the businesses aims, tends to exclude harder to reach sections of society.*

*Projects that put volunteers out of their comfort zone and provide a greater insight into real social issues can be more difficult to get 'buy in' from the business. However, this is where business volunteers gain the most satisfaction from volunteering and achieve the greatest community impact.*

*Businesses can be encouraged to engage with the more challenging volunteering areas by understanding the benefits and having easily accessible and appropriate volunteering opportunities.'*

## Lessons Learned: An interview with Anne-Marie Kesselman



Anne-Marie Kesselman is Head of Marketing and Corporate Responsibility at property consultancy GL Hearn. Anne-Marie pioneered GL Hearn's volunteering programme and has learned a number of valuable lessons along the way.

### Key takeaways if you're looking to introduce volunteering in your company:

- Get senior staff involved so that others feel it's OK to volunteer
- Create a volunteering policy so that the boundaries are clear
- Let employees choose how they support it – not everyone is comfortable with the same things
- Shout about it internally, celebrate success and spread the volunteering bug
- Think about using a broker – they can signpost opportunities for you

### What was GL Hearn's motivation to start volunteering?

Many of our clients like to work with businesses that echo and mirror their own values. Trust is a very important part of our values and one of the easiest ways to create some transparency around that is to be seen as a business that's doing the right thing in the community.

### How did you personally get involved in volunteering at GL Hearn?

Part of my remit as head of marketing was to reinvigorate corporate responsibility within the business. When I got here I looked at what resources were available for staff on the intranet in our 'policies' area and saw immediately that there wasn't a volunteering policy. Unless there is a policy on something within a business you're unlikely to get take-up or interest. Employees may, rightly or wrongly, conclude that it's just not something that the business supports. I designed a volunteering policy that enabled everyone in the business, irrespective of where they sit in terms of job role, to apply for a day's volunteering.

### Were there any barriers?

There was some nervousness from one or two people about there being a gushing Niagara of enthusiasm and people not attending to client work. That's where the policy comes in.

It was also quite important to gain the face-to-face support of some of those Directors who were expressing concerns. It needed some investment, in face-to-face time, to speak to people to avoid the possible scenario where you roll out a policy, send the email with a link to the policy on the intranet, an employee says, 'oh, there's a hospital radio near me that's run by volunteers and I'd like to go and help them out by doing the '70's slot once a week'. That

person goes to his line manager and he's turned down. That wouldn't be good.

### **So what areas do employees volunteer in?**

Projects have ranged from a women's refuge shelter, working with jobless and homeless, working with some of the pockets of deprivation in inner London boroughs where there's a high percentage of children who don't have access to open spaces. We even constructed a farm building for rare breeds of sheep! It's a pretty wide range.

The first year we introduced the policy, we participated in a sporting event at Arsenal, the Emirates Stadium, working with clients of a charity that had experienced joblessness and homelessness. That's the other thing - know your internal customers. In professional services it's mostly male and they are sporting enthusiasts. I looked for events that had a sporting link and the take-up was very positive. We quickly moved to a position where we had about 5 per cent of the business starting to volunteer. Since then we have widened volunteering options further and this year, for instance, we've got over 60 people in the company volunteering. So in four years we've gone from 5 to 25% of the business volunteering.

### **What's been the secret of this success?**

The first priority is to create an enabling environment and have a policy as this provides reassurance that the company is supportive. The next enabling factor is to have some senior role models. If volunteering is seen as a business activity that's just for graduates or people new to the firm, immediately you create a bit of an "it's not really something that senior people do" attitude. Last but not least is to celebrate the success and be public and open about it. Use the information on your website, make it a news item, put it on the intranet, create a buzz around it and enable people to get some recognition.

### **You mentioned that you've worked with the homeless. Are employees always willing to get involved in such a tricky area?**

It's very important to listen to what these charities want. It's not always at the social work end because that's what they deal with. They collect homeless people off the streets, give them shelter and then gradually work with them to understand their needs and move them back into employment. The moving back into employment is where the company volunteers come into play. Workshops are massively important, giving people some experience of IT skills, English classes, how to cope with an interview. It's a very big deal if you've been homeless and you haven't got anything much to put down to go to an interview. There are a myriad of small things that a charity will share with you and they very often will give you some training.

We've done a cake bake to raise money for a homeless charity and that's fantastic because it might pay for the refurbishment of one or two more bedrooms within a hostel that enables a charity to

take in more homeless people and help them on this journey from workless to being economically active again.

### **One thing we've been exploring is whether there is enough time given in corporate volunteering to the elderly. Is this an area that you've worked in at all?**

Being in inner cities, you don't see many organisations looking after senior citizens. We haven't seen the opportunities to work with senior citizens unless it's been through a homeless charity.

Walking around inner cities, there's no shortage of homeless people, drunks, people with drug addiction problems. But do we see elderly people struggling to cross the road? Nope. Perhaps it's a matter of choice as London has become a lot more accessible. Now many of the new stations are being built with accessibility built into it. For example, Canary Wharf and other relatively new stations have lifts from the track - to street level.

### **Do you work with a broker at all in the volunteering that you do?**

When I arrived, GL Hearn was already a pro bono partner with Business in the Community (BitC).

BitC has a good network of charities which creates a framework when you don't have the time to create that framework or have the simple question, where could I volunteer? A broker like Business in the Community can answer that question for you and also can give you a bit of a reality check on the issues. For example, you're thinking of going to help out at the community garden in Hertfordshire but actually it could be that employment is a real issue and the broker can help you get in touch with an organisation actively helping unemployed people come back into the workplace. My experience of BitC is that they are good at connecting businesses with charities and are happy to promote anything and everything that helps our society become a better place.

### **Overall then, what could charities do to make it easier for businesses to volunteer?**

The portal to all volunteering is having the opportunities very well signposted. If there's a price attached to it, make it very clear that in order to participate it's going to cost something. Also, volunteers value some insight into the contribution they have made. It might be a letter, a certificate of some kind, anything that makes business volunteers feel 'I've achieved that', 'I've contributed on this level to this.' The business volunteer may not immediately understand that they've helped to move someone back into employment - which is a huge thing.

50% more people have volunteered in 'children's activities' than 'with the elderly' in the last 2 years



**Kate Cavelle,**  
Head of Pro Bono and  
Community Investment,  
Allen & Overy

*'Not everyone's motivation is the same. There are different reasons for individuals to volunteer and for companies to set up volunteering programmes. They don't have to be mutually exclusive. And you can have different elements to achieve different results. Using skilled volunteers to paint fences is a waste of brain power, but if the motivation is team building then it brings more benefits than going to the pub (and is more inclusive). If the motivation for the business is to develop its employees, then the volunteering activity should challenge them. But there is a common motivation: feeling that your time has been used wisely and that your effort has made a difference.'*

## b) Are businesses right about the areas that are most in need?

Businesses volunteering in areas where they see the greatest need would be an excellent way of improving efficacy if, and only if, they're right about what the greatest needs out there are. The team at Financial Services Ltd may know a cracking amount about the stock market but how's their knowledge on the needs of Tower Hamlets?

We mentioned that 'children's education/activities' was *perceived* as the largest local community issue. Is this perception correct though? Let's look at it alongside another group of people who may need support – the elderly. 40% of businesses think lack of support for children is an issue whereas only 30% think the same for the elderly. Additionally, half of those who think that lack of support for children is an issue think it's the #1 issue, whereas the same ratio is only one fifth for the elderly.

The result of this is that 50% more businesses have volunteered in 'children's education/activities' than with 'older people' over the last 2 years (46% to 29%).

Perhaps this is partially symptomatic of the prevalence of charities. There seems to be significantly more charitable support out there for children than there is for older people. Children's charities with royal patronage outnumber those for the elderly by 5 to 1.<sup>4</sup> If you search by 'charity activities' on the government 'charity commission' website it returns a similar ratio, over 20,000 results are returned for the term 'children'<sup>5</sup> compared to just over 4,000 for 'elderly'.<sup>6</sup>

Yet the need amongst the elderly is significant. In 2011, half of elderly people were not in good health and there were almost 3 million living by themselves, without an immediate support network of friends and family, all of whom could potentially benefit from volunteering help.<sup>7</sup>

Admittedly it is difficult to judge objectively where the greatest need lies, but it does seem that the importance of supporting children, while great, is being overestimated by businesses relative to that of other groups. There are 5 times more charities out there for youngsters than there are for the elderly and businesses are still more likely to say children are lacking in support. Is that accurate?

## c) Are there some areas where support is needed that are currently being neglected?

So let's assume we can take an entirely objective look at community needs and produce a list of the relative levels of help needed in different areas. If this was communicated, would business volunteers follow or would there still be areas left behind?

There are some areas where around half say they wouldn't volunteer; in drug and alcohol rehabilitation (59%), offenders (59%), refugees and asylum seekers (59%) and mental health (48%). Compare this to the fact that only 20% wouldn't want to volunteer in children's education (heartless souls!). Remember, businesses say they are volunteering mainly out of altruism, so what is stopping them from getting involved in these areas?

We asked why people said they would not want to volunteer in particular areas and there were two things that came out most.

1. Not in the interest of the business
2. Not in our skill-set/no training

### Why don't you volunteer in certain areas?

Not in the interest  
of the business

42%

Not in our skill set/  
no training

21%

In a way this second point – a lack of skills – makes sense. It's understandable that employees may feel more qualified to read a child a story than to rehabilitate a lifelong alcoholic. However, the major deterrent we see is that companies just don't see some areas as 'of interest'. The motivation to volunteer in the first place may be an altruistic one, but perhaps the decision

of which area specifically to volunteer in is based more on what perceived benefit they can bring to the business rather than the societal need.

We saw that a top-3 business benefit of volunteering was employee engagement. Will people be as engaged with a drug addict as they will with a delightful child? Another was PR. Is a story more readable if it's about putting smiles on the faces of small children or little steps to helping an ex-criminal get back on the straight and narrow?



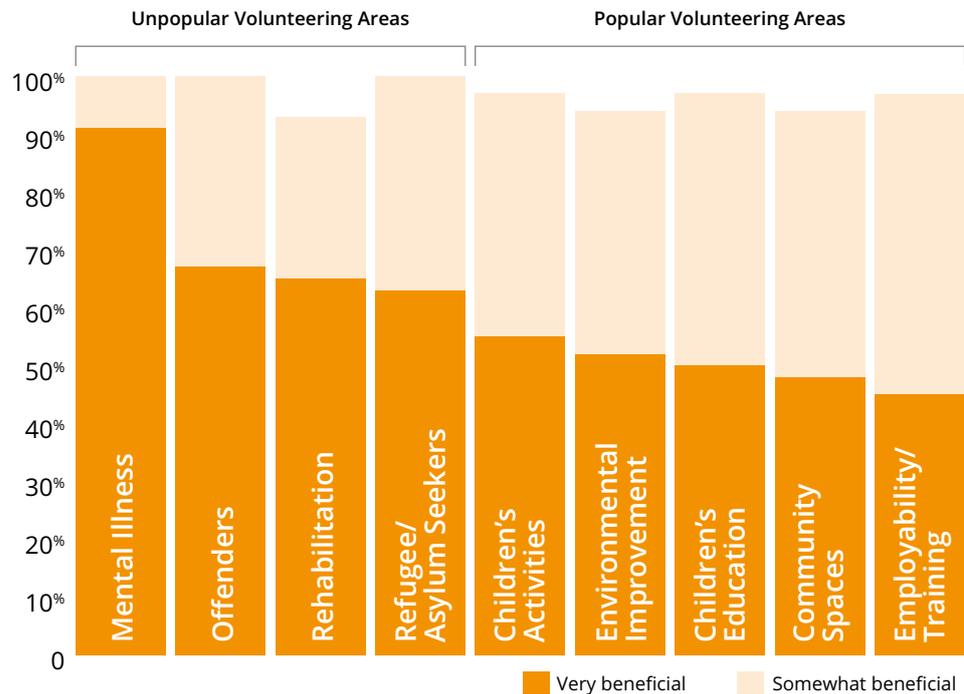
**Kate Cavelle,**  
Head of Pro Bono and  
Community Investment,  
Allen & Overy

*'A common mistake that businesses make is presuming that quantity is more important than quality. Focus tends to be on reporting hours/engagement rather than the impact volunteering has had on the charity, their beneficiaries and the volunteers themselves. Don't think the assignment is finished when the team photo has been taken. Measure impact. Report results. Say thank you.'*

So volunteering, as a whole, makes business sense – but are there exceptions? Maybe companies are only being smart when they 'shun' certain areas in favour of others. To figure out whether or not this is true, we asked people how beneficial volunteering had been to their company and splitting this by the areas companies had volunteered in produced a fascinating result.

The situation – perhaps somewhat surprisingly – is that these more 'undesirable' options are actually *more* rewarding!

## Benefit of volunteering in specific areas



Those who volunteer in the most difficult areas are also most likely to say that volunteering has been 'very beneficial' to their business

As you can see, although volunteering in any area is beneficial, those who volunteered in the most difficult areas – the ones that organisations were more likely to say they'd avoid, are also most likely to say that it has been 'very beneficial' to their business.

Companies may assume that teaching children and planting trees will be best for their business, but this seems to be a misconception. Companies need to be seeking out the more difficult areas of volunteering and grabbing those opportunities with both hands.

If we think about it, this does make sense – if you want to improve communication skills, why not tackle a situation that requires genuinely excellent communication like helping to counsel an ex-offender? If you want to encourage problem-solving, why not present a big

problem, like how to enrich the lives of those with mental health issues, rather than how many coats of varnish to apply to a bench?

Yes, lack of interest from employees is sometimes a barrier to volunteering in certain areas, but that may be due to fear of the unknown more than anything else. Maybe it's time for companies to dive into the deep end and help out in areas where others won't. It's in these areas that the greatest rewards truly lie.

So, people or profits? We say ...  
**why not both?**



**Noa Burger, Corporate Responsibility Manager, City of London Corporation**

*The media certainly plays a role in guiding perceptions about which social issues or groups are in most need or most vulnerable, and equally, which carry the greatest stigma. What you then find is businesses addressing issues that are already being addressed by others because these areas are more comfortable or popular or less risky, rather than because they are best placed to address that issue.*

*The other thing to bear in mind is that issues and needs change, so if unemployment continues to decrease, will we see a relative decline in businesses volunteering in this area? Equally, as the issue of our ageing population has started to climb up the political agenda and get more space in the press and our social consciousness, will more businesses begin to see this as a more pressing issues and then steer their volunteering towards this?*

*Something that came up in research we did back in 2012 was that businesses felt it was easier to change a young person's path than an adult's, and so this was more inspiring for their employees. What they also said was that young people aren't responsible for the difficulties they face and so should be offered support to get them out of the situations they find themselves in. Perhaps it does not need to be one or the other and, with an ageing population, there will be a growing realisation of the benefits of volunteering with adults and helping them to access opportunities to engage in society as well.'*

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# Improving business volunteering: 5 simple steps

## I am a Business ↴

## I am a Charity ↴

#1

**Change the conversation from cost to value.** It can be easy to see volunteering as a business cost but in fact it adds huge value. From team building and motivation to positive PR, volunteering is an opportunity, not an expense.

**Be clear about the business benefits.** Businesses don't just want you to come to them asking for time and money. They appreciate that volunteering can be beneficial to their business so make it clear what you bring to the table.

#2

**Get dates in the diary as far in advance as possible.** There will always be an excuse for not volunteering tomorrow but 6 months in advance can be built around.

**Take their challenges into account.** Businesses say that the biggest barriers to volunteering are the time taken to organise it and having people out of the office. Take as much of the admin out of their hands as possible and plan it around their existing schedules.

#3

**Have a range of volunteering options.** Employees are all different. They may want to work in or out of office hours, in education or construction, teaching or rehabilitation etc... make sure you cater for everyone.

**Be flexible in what you offer and the way you offer it.** All people are different - all employees are different. Companies don't want a one-size-fits-all approach to their volunteering. Give them options in terms of activities tailored for different skill-sets, skill-levels, group sizes and time commitments.

#4

**Work with a broker.** In our study, businesses told us that one of the main barriers to volunteering was time. They also told us that the main benefit of working with brokers was that it reduced the amount of time spent on management... a match made in heaven?

**Get to know them.** Volunteering is personal, so make a personal connection. Get to know their business, go and meet the employees and offer them something tailored and valuable for them.

#5

**Take on a challenge.** We found that charities are much more likely to be volunteering with children or in community spaces than other areas. However, the most 'beneficial' areas to volunteer in are ones such as 'rehabilitation' and 'mental illness'. Don't limit yourself to the 'traditional' areas of volunteering, do something different that will really benefit your business.

**Be clear about what you need.** The main motivation for taking part in volunteering is altruism. Businesses want to help, but they also want it to be straightforward. Summed up in a quote from our research: "[Charities should] be clear about their purpose! Be clear about what help they need!"

## Circle Research

**Circle Research is the B2B market research expert.**

Circle was founded in 2006 and nominated as one of the best new research agencies by the MRS shortly afterwards. We have since been recognised at several industry award ceremonies including The MiAwards, The Marketing Week Awards, the B2B Marketing Awards and the BMA B2s.

Based in London, we work globally with ambitious B2B firms, including half the UK's Top 10 B2B Superbrands.

Our mission is to uncover hidden truths about our clients' target markets and then help them translate these into marketing and commercial success. Through primary research we enable them to:

- Tap into the buying journey and decision dynamics
- Build resonant and differentiated brands
- Make happier, more loyal customers
- Invest in the right marketing channels and messages
- Create great thought leadership content
- Create successful new products or services

Learn more at [www.circle-research.com](http://www.circle-research.com)



## Involve

Involve started in 1999 (it was known as Southwark Cares). From humble beginnings Involve is now an essential needs-led brokerage service for businesses who recognise the connection between the health of their business, their employees and the well-being of the community in which they are located. Involve provides a range of services from active volunteering days to skills based volunteering, from long term individual opportunities to helping you design & deliver your company's volunteering strategy.

Find out more about Involve at [www.involve-everyone.co.uk](http://www.involve-everyone.co.uk)



## Heart of the City

**Heart of the City is the largest responsible small business network in the UK.**

We are a non-profit powerhouse of business leaders and professionals, Corporate Social Responsibility practitioners and social change agents all committed to help small businesses measurably improve our society. To date, over 600 businesses have benefitted from our support. These include thousands of individual professionals from partners in law firms to marketing managers in recruitment consultancies, HR Directors of IT businesses and founders of design agencies – all learning and working together to harness the power of their companies to make a difference.

We act as a responsibility accelerator to help small business take their responsibilities and social strategies from concept to implementation. Whether you need to make a snap judgment on how best to fundraise for charity, introduce a new employee volunteering policy or want to define a long-term CSR strategy, being part of the Heart of the City community instantly connects you to the right people, practical insight and tools you need to make informed decisions quickly and cost-effectively.

Join us at [www.theheartofthecity.com](http://www.theheartofthecity.com)

## Footnotes

1. <http://www.ivr.org/ivr-volunteering-stats/175-what-are-the-barriers-to-volunteering>
  2. <http://policy-practice.oxfam.org.uk/our-work/poverty-in-the-uk>
  3. <http://www.theguardian.com/society/2014/jun/25/homelessness-crisis-england-perfect-storm>
  4. <https://www.royal.gov.uk/CharitiesandPatronages/Search%20Charities%20and%20Patronages.aspx>
  5. <http://apps.charitycommission.gov.uk/ShowCharity/RegisterOfCharities/AdvancedSearch.aspx>
  6. [http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/dcp171776\\_325486.pdf](http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/dcp171776_325486.pdf)
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For more information please contact:

Chris Woolcott, Circle Research Ltd  
E: [chris.woolcott@circle-research.com](mailto:chris.woolcott@circle-research.com)  
[www.circle-research.com](http://www.circle-research.com)