



Discover the Power of Employee Volunteering

A research report on the
business value of volunteering



neighbourly





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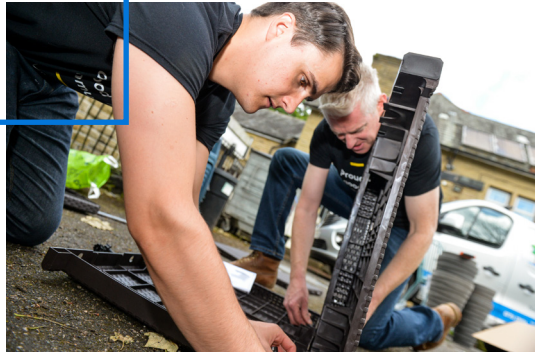
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Neighbourly is a community investment and engagement platform that connects businesses with over 18,000 local charities and good causes across the UK and Ireland. It ensures the delivery of volunteer time, money and surplus products is tailored and targeted to support people in difficult circumstances, helping to build strong communities.

Introduction

There has been an evolution away from 'corporate volunteering', which typically involved large team building activities or off-site days with a charity, to 'employee volunteering'. The change in language is subtle yet clearly reflective of a shift from efforts being company-led, bordering on a 'tick box' exercise with little focus on measurement or impact, to being employee-led based on what charities actually need. The sweet spot comes in between.





THOUGH companies must come up with a policy framework to proactively facilitate and deliver volunteering programmes, mapped to corporate goals, employees are increasingly driving them. They not only want to make a material difference to a good cause, utilising their skills, but they expect to be supported by their employer to do so. As a result, volunteering is now becoming a more common fixture of employment packages, while charities receive something that is much more tailored to their own core objectives.

This movement has been accelerated by an amplified focus on social value during the Covid-19 crisis. Many people have become more socially conscious through the various

found that people in the UK are more likely to trust a business that supports local charities. Going local also offers a better return on investment – a local multiplying effect whereby every pound a company donates to a local good cause will wash around that community three times before it bounces back out nationally again.

As a platform that connects businesses with good local causes, Neighbourly has always understood the value of employee volunteering to business, employees and society. In April 2021, however, the company sought to learn more by commissioning YouGov to conduct a survey of over 2,000 UK employees, asking them about their happiness, trust and likelihood to recommend



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lockdowns, strengthening bonds with their local neighbourhoods, and expect their employer to provide social value alongside traditional business value.

Crucially, employee volunteering is not only beneficial for charities and local communities – it significantly boosts workforce happiness, wellbeing and trust, while driving clear value for businesses, which benefit from more engaged and productive employees and reduced churn.

While corporate organisations have historically tended to partner with just one large national or international charity, a YouGov study last year

their employer.

Through the pages of this report, we reveal the findings of that research report and, importantly, compare the responses of people who have volunteered through an employee volunteering programme with those who haven't.

From this analysis, we can draw fascinating insights on the impact of employee volunteering on both workers and the businesses that they work for, while also sharing best practice on how to maximise value from employee volunteering programmes.



Happiness

People that have done employee volunteering are **happier**



People that have done employee volunteering **said the experience made them feel happy**



Chapter One

The key to a happy workforce

Employee volunteering is a powerful tool for increasing staff engagement and overall happiness at work, which ultimately translates to a more productive and effective workforce.

VOLUNTEERING for local causes has long been recognised as a way of increasing wellbeing while driving positive impact in the community. In an 18-year study of nearly 70,000 participants in the UK, published in the [Journal of Happiness Studies](#) last year, it was found that people who had volunteered in the past year were more satisfied with their lives than those who hadn't.

Part of this is driven by the satisfaction from making a difference to a good cause. According to separate, and ongoing, research that Neighbourly carries out, 100 per cent of employees felt they had delivered something of value after volunteering, 76% said the experience made them feel more

connected to the wider community, and 88% said it made them feel happy.

These findings were also reflected in Neighbourly's YouGov study. 61% of volunteers, through an employee programme, rated their general happiness at seven out of ten or more, compared with only 55% of employees who have never volunteered. A happier workforce is more effective and engaged, with previous [TUC research](#) showing higher wellbeing increases productivity and reduces sick days. When people feel more motivated and satisfied, employee morale is higher.



In a competitive talent landscape where companies invest heavily in employee engagement, volunteering is one of the most powerful tools at their disposal

It's no secret that volunteering can be a rewarding and fulfilling experience, but businesses mustn't overlook the wider value of that sense of happiness a volunteer feels when they've made a difference to another person or good cause. In a competitive talent landscape where companies invest heavily in employee engagement, volunteering is one of the most powerful tools at their disposal. When what somebody cares about becomes part of their job, the job becomes more meaningful to them, and they are more likely to bring their whole self to work.

Finding purpose at work makes employees feel a greater sense of belonging to their employer, creating a symbiotic relationship. They are also likely to feel a stronger connection to their team, especially when sharing their own volunteering experiences with them. Even if it's only for one day, once that bond has been fostered from pulling together to support a good cause, it will flow through into the core tasks of that team, supported by a stronger commitment to each other.

The positive effects of volunteering on personal wellbeing last up to three months and equate to a monetary value of £1,800 per volunteer, according to a [recent LSE analysis](#). In a survey of over 9,000 participants on the NHS Volunteer Responders programme, LSE found that even small acts of volunteering, such as talking to isolated individuals on the phone or delivering them groceries, boosted life satisfaction and feelings of belonging within the local community.

These kinds of 'micro' volunteering opportunities, many of which can be carried out remotely or virtually,

have become more prevalent and popular during the Covid-19 pandemic, opening up the idea of volunteering to new demographics of people who previously didn't consider it. This could have been because they were anxious or uncomfortable about volunteering face to face with people they don't know, or simply because they just didn't feel they had the time to commit.

Historically, Neighbourly's community insights have demonstrated that over three-quarters of people that administer local causes are aged over 40. Yet while the new research found under-35s are the least likely to volunteer in their own time, it did in fact discover they are the most likely to volunteer as part of a workplace scheme, showing just how important such programmes are. With younger workers among the most difficult to engage, it's clear that volunteering should be utilised to keep employees happy, connected, engaged and productive.

Micro volunteering isn't the only cause of greater volunteering uptake during the Covid-19 crisis, however. With everybody spending far more time at home due to lockdowns, we all became more aware of our local communities and the various efforts that keep our neighbourhoods happy and healthy. People engaged on a local level more than they ever had done before, and as a result gained a greater understanding, and interest in supporting, where help was needed. Whether that be upkeep of a park, talking with isolated elderly residents or getting food to those without access to it, the pandemic showed many people just why 'good deeds' are so important.

Employer recommendation

People that have done employee volunteering are **more likely to recommend the company they work for**



People that have taken part in employee volunteering **give their company a higher Employee Net Promoter Score (eNPS) than those that haven't**



The eNPS score also increases in line with the recency of the volunteering experience

People that have done employee volunteering are **more trusting of their company**



The survey shows the link between volunteering and trust in a employer is no coincidence, with 67% of employee volunteers rating the trust they feel towards their company as 7/10 or more as a direct result of the volunteering experience itself

Chapter Two

Increasing trust in a business

With trust one of the most important currencies in business today, employee volunteering is proving to be an invaluable method for driving loyalty among staff and customers alike.

ON a business level, organisations can leverage the multi-dimensional value of volunteering to increase trust in their business. Previous research by Neighbourly has demonstrated the importance of trust in attracting and retaining customers, with 96% of customers more likely to purchase from a brand they trust. But the latest Neighbourly study shows trust is also vital to retaining staff, and wellbeing is closely linked. 70% of respondents who volunteered with their organisation were more likely to trust their employer, compared to 57% of non-volunteers.

This is vital when you consider that 55% of CEOs in [PwC's Annual Global CEO Survey](#) said they are concerned about trust in business today. Overall, the cost to replace an employee earning the average UK salary of £27,721 can reach £12,000, [according to the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development](#). This is based on a combination of using a recruiter to source the talent and the hours an owner would spend hiring the right candidate, creating a substantial cost for any business,

especially companies in an industry with a high staff turnover.

Employees who have taken part in employee volunteering are also more likely to recommend their company, the Neighbourly study discovered. While only 51% of non-volunteers said they would recommend their employer, this rose to 70% among volunteers through an employer-led programme. It reiterates research from [Great Place to Work](#), which found thousands of the employees surveyed for its '50 Best Workplaces for Giving Back' ranking revealed they are more likely to stay with their employer for a long time as a result of its volunteer programmes.

Given the significant costs to replace an employee, anything that reduces churn and increases retention should be a central pillar of a company's talent and people strategy. Employee volunteering clearly meets that criteria. If employees have high happiness and trust in their employer, they are more likely to want to stay in that business, be productive and do well.



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Employee volunteering has a further knock-on effect on customer trust and loyalty. But while businesses might be keen to tell their customers how such programmes demonstrate their commitment to purpose and social value, often it's far more powerful coming from employees as brand advocates. More likely to take pride in their work, many will fly the flag of the brand by promoting their volunteering activity on social media and beyond, which increases the brand equity among customers and further enhances the company's status in the wider community.

Fuelled by the growing desire among customers, particularly of younger generations, for brands to align with their own personal values and stand for more than just profit, businesses are increasingly shifting away from traditional shareholder primary

and considering a much wider group of stakeholders in key decision-making. Approaching employee volunteering successfully means recognising that the wider community around a company is one of those stakeholders.

More and more, organisations are being judged on their ESG (environmental, social and governance) performance as well as their underlying business profitability, not just among customers and employees but also investors. Both employee wellbeing and community engagement sit firmly and prominently within the 'S' of ESG, and companies are realising that employee volunteering is a fundamental enabler of both. It can also be a useful bridge to the 'E' and 'G' of ESG, such as by supporting causes that are focused on the environment or diversity.

Volunteering time lag

Employees are more likely to be happier, recommend their employer and feel more trusting of their employer **if they have volunteered more recently**

General happiness **rated 7 and above**



Likelihood to recommend employer **7 and above**



Trust in company **rated 7 and above**



Chapter Three

Creating a successful programme

While choosing to create an employee volunteering programme is a positive step, employers should be careful to approach it in the right way to maximise value.

THE savviest employee volunteering programmes will align to a specific social impact theme that in turn then aligns with at least one of the business's own core values. By doing so, the efforts are positioned as more integral to the way the business is adopting such programmes, rather than a seemingly random selection of good causes to support. This kind of focused, thematic strategy should be balanced with the opportunity for staff to nominate good causes themselves.

Giving people the chance to choose a charity is a great way of driving employee empowerment and increasing commitment and pride in the volunteering programme. Organisations can achieve alignment to the business and employee empowerment by allowing staff to choose good causes that fit within specified perimeters as per the company's wider goals and values.

Employee volunteering programmes should be led from the top down, though who specifically 'owns' it depends on the specific goals. While traditionally the HR department has taken the lead on such activities, increasingly programmes are starting to fall within the remit of the marketing team, or whoever owns 'brand' within the organisation. This is reflective of the growing recognition in businesses of the power of employee volunteering programmes to improve brand equity and reputation.

Whoever is leading, it's crucial that they understand the vital importance of frequency. To really sustain staff wellbeing, trust and recommendations, employee volunteering programmes need to be enduring, consistent and a regular part of the staff package. This

was evidenced strongly in Neighbourly's study, which found staff who had volunteered in the last three months were 17% more likely to recommend their employer than those who volunteered over a year ago.

Similarly, those who volunteered in the last three months were 25% more trusting of their employer than those who volunteered over a year ago, with 81% of recent volunteers rating their trust seven out of ten or higher. These findings were echoed in the aforementioned study published in the Journal of Happiness Studies, which discovered that people who had volunteered at least once a month were happier than those who did so infrequently or not at all.

The evidence is clear: an employee volunteering programme will see maximum value – for employees, the business and good causes – if it is more cyclical. Rather than taking place annually, companies should consider a quarterly volunteering programme, or at least biannually. That doesn't necessarily mean giving employees more paid leave, as the research results suggest that four quarterly half-days of volunteering will see more enduring value than two biannual full days. The key is in the frequency, less so the duration of each volunteering activity.

By doing this, employers will better maintain those crucial indicators of happiness and trust, rather than in an annual cycle seeing it erode from a three-month point or until employees re-engage with the programme again. Or indeed something like a financial bonus, which, incidentally, the aforementioned LSE research found has a similar wellbeing association.



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Demographics

44%

Male never volunteered

40%

Female never volunteered

Under-35s most likely to have volunteered during the pandemic

12%

Under-35s

9%

34-44s

8%

45-54s

6%

over 55s

BUT under-35s are the least likely to have volunteered during their own time

(15% compared to 21% of over-55s), **implying workplace volunteering is helping to shift the demographics**

Older companies (over 35 years old) are most likely to have provided workplace volunteering programmes in the last year

12%

Over 35 years

8%

20-35 years

5%

10-20 years

9%

5-10 years

Large companies are more likely to have provided an employee volunteering programme

38% overall and 12% in the last year. SMEs only 17% overall and 6% in the last year

Research notes

The research data in this report was compiled from a study by YouGov, commissioned by Neighbourly. The sample size was 2,018 adult employees in the UK, who were surveyed online by YouGov between 1-8 April 2021. The survey participants were asked a series of unbiased questions around their happiness, trust and likelihood to recommend the company they work for, as well as whether (and when) they had volunteered through an employee volunteering programme. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all business sizes.

The future of volunteering

Volunteering is set to become more closely intertwined with people's jobs in the coming years. Neighbourly shares five key recommendations for businesses looking to establish a programme.

THE findings of Neighbourly's research, and the themes covered in this report, demonstrate just how integral employee volunteering programmes are becoming to businesses. Aside from the sheer societal value of companies supporting good causes, there is mounting evidence that carefully crafted employee volunteering programmes result in a happier, more engaged and productive workforce, higher brand trust and equity, and a more successful business overall. The more deeply embedded that volunteering and social value in a business, the greater the benefits for all.

This is just the beginning of a volunteering revolution, however. Employee volunteering will eventually become so intertwined with people's day-to-day jobs that they will seamlessly jump between one and another. Micro volunteering will continue to grow, whether it's tapping into specific skills such as running the social media feed for a local charity or simply delivering some goods to them at the end of the day. It may even become part of the standard job specs from employers which recognise that volunteering creates better employees and better businesses.

Using our experience in helping businesses create and scale employee volunteering programmes and make a positive impact in their communities, Neighbourly has summarised five key steps that organisations should consider to maximise value from their own programmes:

1

Empower your employees to lead it. Create a strong policy framework, but allow your employees to drive it and respond to what your community needs.

2

Align it with your core values. Integrate the programme with your wider business goals, identifying impact themes that overlap with your sustainability strategy.

3

Engage with your community. Embrace the wider community as a stakeholder in your business, listening to their needs and making it a priority to respond as a vested citizen.

4

Do it cyclically and frequently. An annual programme may not create the results you want. Consider quarterly or biannually, even if that means reducing the time.

5

Measure the outcomes. You can't improve what you can't measure. By using a platform like Neighbourly, companies can measure their social and environmental impact.

Crucially, technology is the enabler of all of this, as if employee volunteering is to be more integrated in day-to-day business, companies require a platform that removes all of the friction and hassle, and ensures high uptake. That's where Neighbourly comes in, enabling employee volunteering at scale by triggering participation, automating workflows, acting as a broker, facilitator and communicator between businesses and good causes, and evidencing the impact in a tangible way through data reports and insights that record the

outcomes of those activities. Neighbourly offers needs-based, employee-led opportunities by asking local communities what they need. It then enables employees to connect with those local needs in a way that has never been possible to do previously. Volunteering can no longer be led by a single voice in a business saying, "You must do this." The new world of employee volunteering sees communities calling for help, and employees answering those calls.

If you'd like to talk to us about how to design, scale and maximise business and social value from an employee volunteering programme, email us at hello@neighbourly.com