

# What does an effective EVP look like?

March 19th, 2014 by [Deni Archer](#)

The session opened with a look at trends in employee volunteerism, based on Trialogue's research on the topic from 2007 and 2013. Desiree Story of [FirstRand Volunteers](#) gave some insight into implementation, gleaned from the company's 'Beyond Painting Classrooms' engagements. Attendees looked at what types of volunteering are most commonly implemented by companies, and the pros and cons of each approach. The discussion then led on to ways of ensuring EVPs are successful, and a win-win for all involved.

*A summary of the discussions in Johannesburg, Durban and Cape Town follows.*

## **The benefits are clear, but we still face a number of challenges**

- Most companies at the forum find EVPs to be highly valuable to the business in terms of building stronger relationships in communities, and more specifically with employees. EVPs contribute significantly to strengthening employment brand health, especially among graduates and younger prospective employees, who often consider company CSI programmes when making a decision on who to work for. When employees feel proud to be associated with their company, their satisfaction translates into better morale, higher productivity, and lower staff turnover.
- NPOs can act as valuable social partners. Creating relationships that respect the different assets that each partner brings to the table can help to reap the benefits of having skilled people out in the field, identifying opportunities for EVPs. Joining initiatives like the Grant.net forum (in Cape Town) can also help corporates to understand NPO needs.
- Managing certain EVP activities, like day campaigns, can be an administratively challenging. This is especially the case when there are multiple teams to organise, as EVP programmes are generally very thinly resourced, despite more companies allocating human resources to

managing this. Focusing on understanding the most efficient way to implement these activities can help immensely.

- Contrasts between NPO and corporate cultures can complicate the implementation of EVPs. Corporate tend to be very organised, structured, and goal oriented, whereas the environments in which volunteerism activities occur are far more organic. Employees can feel demotivated when beneficiaries don't show up, or timetables change without notice. This can be overcome through fostering strong engagement and buy in with the beneficiaries. For example, FirstRand's Dreamfields project recently obtained commitment from government to organise reliable transport for children to the tournament.
- It can be challenging to find the balance between what employees want to do, and what the business needs. Aligning passion with policies can seem an impossible task. So do a number of baseline assessments early on: with your NPO partners, to find out what they want and with your staff to learn what it is that will drive them to volunteer. Then work to understand how this can be aligned to your company's CSI programme objectives.
- Continuity is a problem on all EVPs due to both staff turnover and time restraints – especially when employees are expected to volunteer during their personal time. To encourage involvement, it's important to give employees a variety of options for participating, and to leverage the commitment of passionate employees for maximum impact.

### **Employee volunteerism programmes are as unique as the businesses they function within — some corporate approaches**

- **Old Mutual Investment Group's Green Hands Trust** only supports projects that staff members are actively involved in. They like the personal aspect that this brings and find it enhances employee buy in. Furthermore, intimate knowledge and understanding of the beneficiary organisation helps in formulating an effective and relevant project. When donating goods, they aim to "give with dignity" by contributing high quality items only.
- Managing one EVP for over 12 000 employees would be a daunting task in anyone's book. So **Sanlam** devolve the management of their EVPs to

their various business clusters. They prescribe a set of “loose and tight principles” within which the clusters can conceive of and implement creative projects, under the oversight of Group HR.

- **Mediclinic** have overcome their two major challenges – managing a 13 000-strong, national footprint employee volunteer base, and a high turnover in their nursing component – by focusing on leveraging their more dependable employee contingency such as engineers and training and development staff.
- **NPC-Cimpor** have just launched a new EVP in line with the directive of its new holding company in Brazil. The holding company has a very structured and board-driven approach to volunteering, resulting in an EVP that is now strategically linked to NPC-Cimpor’s CSI programme.
- **CHEP** relies significantly on volunteerism as a way of implementing its CSI programme with a small budget. Each employee is allowed three working days for volunteering annually, and CHEP offers ongoing volunteering opportunities. The team activities have stimulated healthy rivalry across the business, which has proven an excellent motivation for staff as the business boasts almost 100% employee participation in day campaigns.
- **SAPREF** encourages employees to choose their own volunteer projects in any sector, provided that they gather a team of at least three colleagues to join their cause. Time-based or fundraising projects are accepted, and the company matches their time (non-working hours) or funds raised up to a value of R20 000 per project. The challenge lies in reaching the people who are doing good work already – of which there are many – and linking these with the company’s programme.
- Last year, **African Bank** publicised their EVP project selection process in their branches, leveraging external communications in an engaging and personal way. Posters showcased staff members and the projects they supported. Customers were able to recommend projects for those staff who didn’t already support one. There was customer vote for the winning cause in each branch.
- **MicrosoftSA** offers four pillars of volunteerism that employees can choose from, aligned to CSI focus areas. They prefer this more structured

approach, as it decreases the risk of project die out when a passionate employee leaves the business.

### **All EVPs can benefit from some winning strategies**

- EVPs don't necessarily conform to a 'best-practice formula'. Your company culture is unique and your EVP should align with that to provide an experience your employees can relate to. The most important aspect is knowing what your purpose and objectives are (from being an employer of choice, to CSI alignment, to achieving strategic business benefit) and then allow that to integrate with your company culture.

- EVPs need to be driven from both the top and the bottom. It's crucial to have executive support for the programme, and passion from employees. Passion can't always be directed, so go with the good that's happening – don't discourage employee volunteer action that may not fit with your vision. Aim to indentify how you can help, and mould the work so that it ties in with the programme and policy.

- To ensure participation, an EVP should consider employee interests as well as time constraints, and be structured to accommodate these in the most convenient manner. Some ideas include hosting EVP events at the office (e.g. Cell C's 'Take a girl child to work'), or including family participation over the weekend or out of work hours.

- Form long-term relationships with beneficiary NPOs. This will allow for a deeper understanding of needs and identification of interesting and rewarding opportunities for volunteerism. This kind of relationship works for initiatives such as Investec's skills-based volunteerism – where skills gaps are identified at an NPO and employee volunteers are matched with the NPO to provide training to staff.

- Collaborate with other corporates on projects where a critical mass of employees is required.

- Some companies allow for one to three days per year (much the same as study leave allowance) to ensure employees have the opportunity to contribute. This is often strengthened by linking volunteering to KPIs.

- Devolving responsibility for implementation to departments helps to rally

participation. According to research and discussions at the forum, achieving a participation rate of between 10 and 20 percent is considered satisfactory.

- Finding a way of communication that is effective in rallying employee participation is key. **Mr Price's Red Cap Foundation** uses social media (e.g. Twitter and Facebook) as a method of encouraging enthusiasm, in addition to the usual internal channels. Using the social networks that most staff use daily for personal use has fostered buy-in to volunteering generally across the company by avoiding the fragmentation that often occurs when each department has its own strategy.

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