



During April, the Greater Philadelphia Corporate Volunteering Council conducted a series of informal discussions around how COVID-19 is affecting employee volunteerism. The GPCVC thanks everyone who was able to participate.

Below are the compiled key takeaways and generalized opinions. This information will inform the programming for GPCVC in the coming months. Stay tuned for opportunities to stay engaged by following our [Linked In Page](#).

COVID-19 DISCUSSIONS KEY TAKEAWAYS

1. Employee's Motivation to Volunteer Remains High

- Request from employees on how to help, guidance on volunteering and inquiries about starting new drives or initiatives all have continued -- if not increased -- due to the crisis. The desire to help in some capacity at the beginning – when the situation was most unclear – could become overwhelming for some practitioners.
- Avenues to channel that drive to be helpful have had to evolve in order to meet the needs of keeping employees safe and following corporate and governmental guidelines, as well as making sure employees are meeting the direct needs of nonprofit partners.
- Specifically, some corporations have pulled back from pushing any specific engagement initiatives, instead giving soft promotion by offering a range of opportunities and letting employees decide.
 - An underlying worry for many is that their mental bandwidth is already strained by adjusting work priorities to the new normal while continuing to fulfill both business and personal life expectations.
- Donor fatigue among employees is being discussed. Individuals are weighing how to balance the Corporate asks/promotions, philanthropic partner asks and general public asks, all with the knowledge that there will also be a recovery phase which will need resources of money, time, and talent as well.

2. Storytelling Returns as a Method to Interact with Stakeholders

- Whether for employees or customers, storytelling has resurfaced as a way to stay connected during the crisis.
- For some corporations, their largest engagement to and from employees is the sharing of stories of how they are weathering the crisis as well as sharing the different volunteer programs they are supporting.
- The use of storytelling has been embraced as an avenue to keep employees motivated but also to remind all about best practices and other needed updates.
- Using internal networks and external hashtags, employees are empowered to voice their experiences with transitioning to virtual work and so continue their previous workplace culture.

3. Changing Business Practices and Role Responsibilities

- “Blended Business” appears to be the new normal, where volunteerism is just one of several responses a corporation is making in terms of outreach to employees, as well as customers and NPOs.



- Several corporations are repositioning their CSR initiatives at the intersection of business, philanthropy and volunteerism, with some practitioners noting that nothing is siloed anymore, and holistic approaches are being generated.
 - With this comes the recognition that certain business functions take precedence over other initiatives. For example, product donations or retooling of manufacturing or skilled teams to address certain needs. All of this done outside the usual boundaries of community engagement.
- New levels of approvals have come into place for what was previous routine communication to employees or nonprofit partners.
- Some corporations have placed a hold on their routine charitable giving, focusing instead on the use of philanthropic dollars:
 - For initiatives not previously supported – capacity grants
 - Donations to a general fund that in turn disperse the grants
 - To allow upwards of 100% match to a certain threshold of employee’s charitable gifts to nonprofits of their choice or a corporate selected group.

4. Evolving Volunteerism Priorities and Expectations

- Paramount for many corporations is taking care of employees and making sure they still view themselves as part of a team.
 - Some practitioners have placed the promotion of volunteerism on hold, prioritizing instead internal-facing initiatives to “support our own” and make sure the stresses of living in the crisis are being addressed. They have begun to stress how they can keep employees connected internally. Their new function is to act as a conduit of connectivity and internal cohesion and to facilitate open communication.
- Several corporations have given guidance that practitioners cannot promote in-person volunteering.
 - For those operating in such a structure and even where such guidance has not been officially announced, this highlights the tension between the responsibility to keeping employees safe vis-a-vis their community partner needs and the service the partners provide to society.
- For corporations that had autonomous or self-driven volunteerism at local levels, the demand for virtual volunteerism has led some practitioners to take up sourcing and to provide guidance on which volunteer opportunities employees could dedicate their time to.

5. Uncertainty Regarding How to Support NPO partners

- Like most individuals and corporations, our NPO partners are/ were unprepared for demands that COVID-19 has placed on working, volunteering resources and mission delivery. However, in the continual changing climate around COVID-19, in-person volunteerism and philanthropy, there is no clear guidance or advice on how to move forward.



- It is evident to all practitioners that the nonprofits are in emergency mode, especially in these times where the immediate challenge is to meet their double bottom line: money and mission.
- Practitioners recognize:
 - Dealing with requests for volunteers for many nonprofits is not a priority
 - Not all nonprofits are set up or understand how to best use virtual volunteers
 - Needs and priorities from before might no longer hold and therefore, new requests and understandings will need to be generated.
- Most practitioners have not been able to have in-depth conversations with partners due to time constraints.

6. Virtual Volunteerism Has Been Utilized to Differing Levels by Members

- Some corporations have received positive response from employees regarding virtual volunteering options. Many employees are taking self-initiative in offering options.
- Some practitioners have noticed a need to change employee attitudes towards virtual volunteering:
 - Communicating that virtual volunteering is just as supportive as volunteering in person when done in a skilled manner.
 - Acknowledging that low participation numbers could also be a function of shifted priorities for employees.
- When offering virtual options with external partners, it can be hard to track what employees are doing if the employees do not share back what activities that have taken advantage of.
- Some corporations are referring employees to virtual volunteering options with NPO partners that they had no previous relationship with.

7. Speculation on Permanent Changes in The Employee Volunteerism Landscape

- For some nonprofits, employee volunteerism is a source of revenue. Currently, virtual volunteerism is outside of these revenue streams. Will nonprofits endeavor to capitalize on skills-based volunteerism?
- Will nonprofits continue to require extensive orientation for volunteers, or will the need for skills-based and virtual volunteers have demonstrated that nonprofits can utilize volunteers outside their previous roles?
- If virtual volunteerism is here to stay, how will it be integrated into company-sponsored volunteer weeks / days?

5/7/2020