

## **Brokering Corporate Volunteering**

Given the increased profile of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and individual employees' search for a greater sense of community and meaning, we are seeing more and more businesses embracing staff volunteering. A growing number of the large Australian companies now have official employee volunteering programmes, enabling staff to take 1 or 2 paid days off work to volunteer in the community.

Most typically, corporate volunteering is either individual volunteering or team challenges. Individual volunteering under a company volunteering banner is, in practice, really no different to traditional individual volunteering, it simply happens on company time. Team challenges often take the guise of planting trees, renovations, basic fundraising events, packing hampers or cleaning up a creek. Although these are all great things to do, there are a huge number of opportunities to get more creative.

Before considering these volunteering opportunities lets look at the other side of the partnership equation. Many non-profit organisations feel ill-equipped to deal with large numbers of corporate volunteers – particularly at short notice. Typical community programmes need stable, long-term volunteers in small numbers, not a few hundred for a day. Only a few larger non-profits have the luxury of a volunteer manager. As a result few can handle the project management needed to deal with large groups.

It is this increasing differential between the availability of business volunteers and the ability of small and large non-profits to accommodate business volunteers that has led to more discussions about brokerage services. So what should these brokerage services offer?

Over the last two years we have analysed business needs when it comes to staff volunteering and found a clear pattern repeated across companies. As a basis, they are looking for volunteering partnerships to:

- Be well managed
- Not waste staff time
- Include staff development opportunities
- Provide someone to do project management
- Be easy to do
- Be meaningful to staff
- Produce social impact
- Not be a reputation risk

Ideally volunteering projects will fit with the company brand and vision as well.

The community organisations we have worked with have clear needs around:

- Project management training & support
- Having access to templates for agreements, policies and checklists to manage partnerships
- Ensuring safety & sensitivity for vulnerable clients involved with business volunteers
- Knowing business will show respect and understanding for their mission and their skills

These different expectations and the desire on both sides to leave the partnership management to the other creates an opening for a dedicated brokerage service. Such

brokerages have operated under various banners, such as Cares, in the US and UK and some places in Australia,

As any good business or non-profit knows, the success of any organisation, including a brokerage, is about people and relationships. A brokerage needs people to create relationships, manage expectations, provide marketing, advice and training, manage supply & demand and needs to be entrepreneurial in seeing opportunities and testing out different approaches. A brokerage will be seen by business and community organisations as a team of people they trust based on their ability to solve their particular problems in setting up and managing partnerships. For this reason brokerages need to go beyond website matching services or services creating little more than initial introductions between business and community.

With the help of dedicated local brokerages businesses and community organisations can explore an expanded range of volunteering and partnership options. Examples of such options are mentoring, pro bono access to training, provisioning of services in kind, skills transfer, planning and operational assistance, access to company resources and secondments. Many of these types of partnerships require training, facilitation and a goal to ensure success.

Being able to broker complex partnerships beyond arranging for three people to come and paint a fence is key to the value of the brokerage. This is what will drive increasing numbers of organisations into participating. In turn the brokerage continues to build expertise and learns for example how to organise a 'Social Impact Day' such as when Deloitte Consulting had over 270 volunteers work on 35 projects in Maribyrnong in 2003.

The structure of a successful brokerage covers four functions:

Marketing Communication & Information	Opportunity Matching, Partnership Management & Education
Supply & Demand Balancing Finding Partners	Training all Stakeholders Facilitation of Projects

Ideally the brokerage will have several staff:

1. A full-time Executive Manager with fundraising responsibility
2. Two full-time people involved in finding partners, opportunity matching, project management & facilitation and administration
3. A part-time PR & Marketing person
4. A part-time or contract trainer.

Staff need to be able to build relationships with business, NGO's and government bodies. They will likely have worked in the private and public sectors, as intimate knowledge of how business and community groups work is required to be effective in the roles. On top of this staff will combine an entrepreneurial, empathetic and results driven attitude. The more of the workload of managing the partnership the brokerage can take on board initially, the more effective it is going to be. Clients on both sides will be time poor and willing to give up some

control in return for results achieved with integrity. This will change over time as they build confidence in the partnership and experience the benefits.

A brokerage with the right funding model and the right entrepreneurial attitude will learn from experience and grow (with) demand. The brokerage team will take a proactive stance and not wait for businesses or non-profits to show up on the doorstep. The brokerage staff will also learn when a partnership becomes self-sustainable and it is time for them to bow out playing the middle man.

In addition the brokerage should be set up as an independent body with its own governance structure. Having a mixed board with business and community representation will be instrumental in being seen as impartial and not driven by the agenda of just a few organisations. Given that the funding model is predominantly through business and government sources, they should have increased representation on the board. Board positions should be a mix of governance focussed roles and hands-on roles. With the small team size part of the board needs to take an active part in building and maintaining relationships, fundraising and mentoring staff. Funding and board processes need to be fully transparent.

From our experience we believe that a brokerage is more effective when focussing on a particular geographic region, which may comprise one or neighbouring local government area. The meaning of community is inherently localised and a local structure is more likely to find acceptance than an 'outside intruder'. Further, only a local brokerage could adequately build relationships with the myriad of very small community organisations and small businesses that comprise the vast majority of groups. A non-local service would have the clear tendency to favour the large player simply for lack of local knowledge.

Regional brokerages can cover broad areas and use outreach services working across scattered communities. In very small towns traditional community structures are often still intact and businesses are 'naturally' involved in and part of the community. It remains to be tested to what degree a brokerage service can provide new skills and ideas to such small communities.

It is also vital that such a brokerage service has the skills to work with medium and small business as well as corporate Australia. The current CSR debate is broadening into Business Social Responsibility to incorporate all business sizes. This will likely accelerate as large business looks for its good citizenship values to be reflected in its supply chain and as it becomes generally more accepted that business needs to reintegrate into society.

Whilst we believe that government should support the establishment of such brokerages through seed funding (including the process of initial local stakeholder consultation and buy-in), in the long term the brokerage should be self-sustainable through membership fees and fee-for-service work. Membership fees are likely to be tiered, based on the number of employees in the business and capped for large corporates. This is a model that has proven to work in the UK. The brokerage itself should be a non-profit, so that it can engage in fundraising beyond membership fees and provide a tax benefit to contributing businesses.

The business model of the brokerage should include ongoing measurement of results and evaluation of projects. Both should be made freely available to all members and stakeholders, opening the door to results based funding.



Whilst the model of the brokerage is easy to understand this does not mean that it can simply be 'dropped' into a community and be expected to work. The brokerage needs stakeholder consultation and buy-in to garner sufficient momentum for a head start. This process can be driven by a community organisation, a business, an external entity, state or local government or ideally by a combination of stakeholders. The process can be tightly managed and does not need to look for consensus from all businesses and community groups to be successful.

State Government could play a significant role in accelerating the process of such brokerages being established. By adopting a brokerage template and a process template for stakeholder buy-in interested communities could achieve deployment quite rapidly if seed funding is provided as well. This initial momentum would be highly valuable to the process of giving stakeholders the benefits of fast results and success stories.

With our current work on building business volunteering brokerage services in a number of areas we have learned first hand that the demand for managing business involvement in the community is shared by all stakeholders. We believe that this brokerage model and stakeholder consultation process could provide a template for other areas as well. There is also great scope for utilising a common brand for any brokerage service that is established in line with a template, providing recognition and credibility.

Business volunteering is very much 'flavour of the month' at the moment and the current focus and funds in the Department for Victorian Communities provide a great opportunity for Victoria to rise on the crest of this wave.