

# Employee Volunteering: Who is Benefiting Now?

A report by Katya Brooks (PhD) and Angela Schlenkhoff-Hus (PhD)  
on behalf of CSV, 2013



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## Background

This research was conducted by Katya Brooks, Project Manager, and Angela Schlenkhoff-Hus, Development Manager, in the Employee Volunteering department at CSV as part of CSV's 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations.

This report is intended to stimulate cross-sector discussion and partnership development and to offer scoping for future research. It seeks to review trends and developments within employee volunteering (EV) and to explore how to make its benefits accessible and meaningful to more public, private and third sector organisations and employees. It aims to highlight, gain insight, and provide a platform for the various voices engaged with EV from Government, community organisations, the private sector, and CSV.

## Methodology

Data was collected and analysed between November 2012 and February 2013. During this period, forty in-depth, semi-structured interviews and three focus groups were conducted. Participants were selected due to their engagement with EV and included representatives from CSV, EV 'brokers', community organisations, businesses and research bodies. An online survey generated supportive statistical data from SME<sup>1</sup> owners and employees.

## Introduction

Employee Volunteering (EV), also known as Employee-Supported Volunteering (ESV) and Corporate Volunteering (CV), "enables a valuable interchange of ideas, skills and knowledge. Employee volunteering is a three-way partnership between an employer, employee and a beneficiary."<sup>2</sup> EV is defined here as:

- *Applying to all employers regardless of sector be that profit, non-profit, public or private;*
- *Carried out in work time/hours;*
- *Employer enabled/induced;*
- *Having a social benefit.*<sup>3</sup>

Imported to the UK from the US in the early 1990s, the concept of EV has become an established part of corporate social responsibility (CSR) and human resources (HR) policies and agendas. Evidence of the extensive business, personal and community benefits of EV is well-documented and compelling, as this report will outline.

Twenty years on, the traditional distinctions between civil society, public and private sector are changing. The three sectors are moving closer to each other, creating partnerships, synergies and organisations that, in their very nature, straddle sector boundaries. According to the World Economic Forum,<sup>4</sup> there is now a shared space between the three sectors in which societal challenges are being addressed, building "new frameworks for collaboration, partnership and innovations resulting from increased intersections." There is increasingly, "a blurring of traditional roles."

While this allows for more innovation and joined-up approaches, at the same time the voluntary sector is trying to plug the gaps left by reduced government spending. NCVO announced that the UK voluntary sector "stands to lose £3.3 billion over the spending review period (2010/11-2015/16)."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> As defined by the European Commission: "The main factors determining whether a company is an SME are: 1) number of employees and 2) either turnover or balance sheet total."

- Small: 0 – 49 employees; less than €50 m turnover
- Medium: 50 – 249 employees; less than €10 m turnover

<sup>2</sup> Jenkins, H. (2013) *The ABC of CSR*. Cardiff: ESRC Centre for Business Relationships, Accountability, Sustainability and Society (Brass). Accessed: <http://www.brass.cf.ac.uk/abc/>

<sup>3</sup> Policy Agenda for Volunteering in Europe (2011)

<sup>4</sup> World Economic Forum (2013) *The Future Role of Civil Society*. Accessed: <http://www.weforum.org/reports/future-role-civil-society>

<sup>5</sup> NCVO UK Civil Society Almanac (<http://data.ncvo-vol.org.uk/almanac/voluntary-sector/income-in-focus/how-are-public-sector-spending-cuts-affecting-the-voluntary-sector/>, accessed 7 January 2013)

In this context, approximately 70 per cent of FTSE 100 businesses now have an active EV programme, but only 33 per cent of public sector and 23 per cent of private sector organisations overall.<sup>6</sup> There is clear potential for a significant rise in EV; for all sectors to offer greater support to each other; for brokers, businesses and community organisations to publicise EV opportunities and associated benefits; and for cross-sector understanding to increase. Ultimately, this raises the question: *what is the role of EV for all three sectors in the age of austerity?*

## Main Findings

### ***Who Benefits Now and How?***

Tom Levitt, former Labour MP and author of *Partners for Good: Business, Government and the Third Sector*, summarises EV benefits as: “for businesses it is all about reputation, innovation and human resources development; for charities it is access to funds – with reputation, access to contacts and innovation some way behind.”<sup>7</sup> There is an intrinsic mismatch; however, all interviewees stressed the benefits of EV to businesses, employees, community organisations and local communities. The benefits are not one-way; all sectors have something to contribute to each other and can benefit from sharing experience, knowledge, skills and other resources.

### ***Innovation and Making a Difference***

All three stakeholders directly involved in EV – employers, employees/ volunteers and community organisations – strive to make a difference through engaging with each other in community projects in innovative ways. They exist in symbiosis: community organisations increasingly need to show credible partnership work in order to access funding and to continue operating, as well as becoming savvier about impact measurement and strengthening their evidence base for services they are delivering. Making the most of volunteers in an innovative way can help to meet the increasing demand for their services in a framework of funding cuts. Employers need cooperative relationships with community organisations in order to meet their CSR and HR targets and to justify designating funds to EV programmes and charitable causes.

### ***Core Business and Consumers***

EV is being increasingly aligned with specific core business agendas as Bob Thust, Director of Corporate Responsibility (CR) at Deloitte asserted: “*We want to use our core business expertise, skills, networks and influence as part of longer-term partnerships to create enhanced impact with our community partners.*” The majority of CSR and HR representatives interviewed echoed his view and agreed that, “Those companies that best integrate CSR into overall business practices will reap the rewards born of increased consumer confidence,”<sup>8</sup> through positive publicity and increased trust. As 88 per cent of consumers are more likely to buy from a business that visibly supports and engages in activities to improve society,<sup>9</sup> the benefits of EV here are clear.

In a struggling economy, EV helps businesses access niche or wider markets (for example, social enterprises as new clients/suppliers) and raises their profile in local communities. Similarly, community organisations are able to access skills, and potentially new funding streams in partnerships with businesses, thereby raising their own public profile. Innovation in partnership can mean both community organisations and businesses gain a competitive edge.

### ***Boost to Employees and Business***

Private sector interviewees viewed offering of EV opportunities as a core strategy to increase employee engagement and retention: the rewards of committing to “*giving something back*” and

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<sup>6</sup> Volunteering England (2011) *The Practical Guide to Employer Supported Volunteering for Employers*. Accessed: <http://www.volunteering.org.uk/resources/esv-resource-hub/guides>

<sup>7</sup> Levitt, T. (2012) *Partners for Good: Business, Government and the Third Sector*. Farnham: Gower Publishing Limited

<sup>8</sup> S. McLeod (2010) ‘CSR is no longer a bolt on activity’, *The Guardian*

<sup>9</sup> C&E (2011), quoted in Cook, P. (2012) ‘The right partner’, *The Charity Times*.

“making a difference” to a person or community organisation boost employee morale, satisfaction and pride in their employer. The cost of employee time away from work are outweighed by the business benefits as Ruth Worton, Charity Manager at npower, explains, “if the people are positive, it transfers to the company and volunteering is a fundamental part of that.”

EV was identified as an important tool to develop employees’ professional and soft skills and to attract new talent. Whether or not a business has CSR and EV initiatives in place can be a key factor in selecting a future employer: “Graduates now feel it’s essential to have volunteered. Future leaders will have a different mind-set right from the beginning of their career and a lot will already have had some voluntary experience. [...] It’s more engrained in the psyche of graduates.”<sup>10</sup>

For Mike Westcott, Global HR Director at National Grid, EV ticks several cross-departmental boxes simultaneously:

*It is part of what makes us distinctive as an employer and makes careers at National Grid more attractive, which drives future recruitment. Volunteering picks up on working with communities, making it more win-win, and it fits at least two areas of importance to National Grid; it’s not a difficult sell.*

### *Cross-Sector Understanding*

Most interviewees reported profound benefits from EV in terms of increasing cross-sector understanding, changing preconceptions and raising awareness about the challenges each face. For example:

*The Government’s very keen on civil servants being out there volunteering both as a way of learning about the sector and supporting civil society organisations but also as a means of helping civil servants to develop and learn about the issues facing organisations and people down there on the ground who are really struggling for funding.*<sup>11</sup>

### *Vital Support for Community Organisations*

EV can be a powerful tool of local change and make a significant difference to cash-strapped community organisations. As Andy Terrey, Head of Granton Primary School stated:

*We’re doing the core bits and CSV is the enrichment of what we’re doing. Financially it’s important as well. It took a day for thirty volunteers to paint the outside walls while it would take the premises manager two weeks to paint by himself. You know, it speeds up the rate of change.*

Feedback from community organisations supported by employee volunteers on practical, interactive and skills-based projects brokered by CSV in 2012 underlines the significance of this support:

- 73% would not have been able to complete the tasks without volunteers;
- For 93% the benefits gained either balanced (19%) or outweighed (74%) the costs of hosting volunteers;
- 100% would like future support from employee volunteers;
- 94% rated the impact of employee volunteers on their organisation as ‘high’ or ‘very high’;
- EV projects led to further opportunities for community organisations: 76% highlighted awareness raising, further volunteers (55%), raised profile and press coverage (42%), and skills-sharing (40%);
- 95% will include EV in their future organisational plans.

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<sup>10</sup> Mark Gibson, Chief Executive, Whitehall Industry Group

<sup>11</sup> John Knights, Policy Manager for Volunteering, Office of Civil Society

Thompson *et al* in their report *Employee Volunteering – Where are we now?*<sup>12</sup> found that community organisations with larger incomes (£10-100million) “are more likely to engage Corporate Volunteers.” Where does this then leave community organisations at local level?

### ***Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (SMEs): The Untapped Local Resource?***

Currently, “only 14 per cent of [SMEs] have access to employer-supported volunteering schemes, compared with 47 per cent of people who work for companies with more than 250 staff.”<sup>13</sup> SMEs in the UK employ over 14 million people, have a combined turnover of £1500billion, and account for 99 per cent of all businesses, 59 per cent of private sector employment and 49 per cent of private sector turnover.<sup>14</sup> With these kind of resources it seems there is a lot for employee volunteering to tap into.

There is inequity in the extent to which businesses of all sizes can participate in and gain from the benefits of employee volunteering due to their differing resource and social capital levels. For example, as Ann Woodhall, HR and Facilities Director at Little Brown Book Group explained: “*We don’t have a dedicated CSR person to organise volunteering opportunities for our staff. It was such a shock to me to discover that there are companies with whole CSR departments! It’s hard for me to find the time.*”

However, the research found that many SME employees and employers are already ‘doing’ EV; it may not be called or recognised as ‘EV’ or even ‘volunteering’ and it may be outside of work time, such as being a school governor or charity trustee. “Research,” as Tom Levitt suggests, “shows that smaller SMEs are more community aware than larger ones, probably because they are literally closer to the communities they are working in,” whilst the Federation for Small Businesses argues that larger businesses do not necessarily have the best CSR policies.<sup>15</sup>

The majority of brokers interviewed are, or will be, developing strategies and programmes to involve more SMEs in their local communities, but perhaps learning points for corporates and medium-sized businesses can also be gleaned from smaller ones.

### ***Understanding, Needs and Expectations: A Mismatch?***

Interviewees from all sectors underlined the necessity for increased communication and understanding about expectations and realities of EV – particularly regarding volunteer management, training, monitoring and measurement, volunteering opportunities available, and the inherent financial and HR costs for all parties.

Community organisations are being approached by businesses with requests for EV opportunities in line with CSR strategies which, in turn, are strongly aligned with their own core business. In effect, community organisations are rendered players or assets in the global market place in which businesses are trying to distinguish themselves from competitors and gain market share. In expectation of developing long-term, sustainable partnerships, some community organisation interviewees shared experiences of feeling pressurised to host, manage and provide opportunities requested by businesses even if these did not fit with their own needs. Willingness of businesses to discuss or ask about community needs is essential. Furthermore, businesses need to be aware of the potential effects of this not occurring, such as, frontline resources being misdirected, already over-stretched community organisation staff and volunteers becoming disillusioned by EV and businesses’ offers of support, etc.

As a result, many community organisations interviewed now only offer EV opportunities to existing private or public sector partners or where volunteering promises to be a vehicle for a longer-term commitment. They are seeking more sustainable partnerships with businesses which will help

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<sup>12</sup> Thompson, C. et al (2012) *Employee Volunteering – Where Are We Now?* London: Corporate Volunteering Network (CVN)

<sup>13</sup> Jump, P. (2008) ‘Campaign backs volunteers plan,’ *Third Sector*. Accessed: <http://www.thirdsector.co.uk/news/834774/Campaign-backs-volunteers-plan/?DCMP=ILC-SEARCH>

<sup>14</sup> Federation of Small Businesses (2012). Accessed: <http://www.fsb.org.uk/stats>

<sup>15</sup> Levitt, T. (2012) *Partners for Good: Business, Government and the Third Sector*. Farnham: Gower Publishing Limited

them plan for the future. This recognises the fact that it is resource intensive for charities to offer volunteering opportunities. Community organisations are steadily gaining confidence in developing new partnerships, defining which types of projects would benefit them, and managing expectations. Clare Thompson, Fundraising Development Executive at Scope explained one of the biggest lessons she has learnt: *“It’s okay to say ‘no’ to a corporate. If I can’t fulfil ‘an ask’, I explain why and offer alternatives.”*

### ***Mismatch Between CSR Strategies and Employee Volunteers***

All brokers and the majority of community organisations interviewed highlighted a common mismatch between businesses’ CSR/HR strategies and employees’ vision and motivation and how they would like to make use of their employers’ volunteering policy. This is most evident in businesses’ current enthusiasm for a move away from purely practical, team volunteering to skills-based, often not being shared by employees.

One interviewee from a third sector umbrella organisation believes that, *“CSR departments work on strategy almost in a silo and develop programmes at high level which are then imposed from above without giving line managers the chance to shape them – involving HR is key [to employee engagement].”* Mark Gibson, Chief Executive of the Whitehall Industry Group states, *“If employees are engaged in formulating the strategy around volunteering, they’ll be a lot keener to take up the opportunities. That’s what we’ve noticed ourselves in the Whitehall and Industry Group”.*

In addition, while in financially difficult times community organisations signal an increased need for volunteers, employees are less willing to engage in longer-term volunteering as they experience more pressure at work and might be worried about their jobs.

All of this can have an effect on the interest and take-up. Several brokers and community organisations reported investing resources into developing skills-based volunteering programmes for an employer, e.g. as part of an application to become national charity of the year, but then experiencing very little to no interest and take-up from actual volunteers on the ground.

### ***Skills-Based Volunteering: The New Trend?***

Many businesses interviewed explained that they are increasingly looking to include skills-based volunteering projects in their CSR and HR activities. Deloitte is *“committed to skills-based EV to make best use of our talent”*, according to Bob Thust. Further:

*“With all volunteering projects we want to make a connection with the firm’s core business skills, and have more in-depth engagement - and therefore, greater impact with our community partners. For example, using our business expertise to help social enterprises scale their impact, and connecting them into our supply chain.”*

Mike Westcott concurred, *“Previously, any volunteering would do but we’re more focused now and prefer our people to use their ‘natural’ skills and professional skills, for example, running science and engineering clubs in schools.”* Whilst Jan Levy, Managing Director of Three Hands, noted that some EV days his company delivers for businesses are, *“half day practical, half day skills-sharing. If you have senior managers, it would be a waste for them to only do practical work.”*

What emerged clearly from the research was that many interviewees across the sectors saw a divide between skills-based volunteering projects and practical projects emerging in public opinion. This was perceived as an almost either/or divide with the former being favored, though the majority of interviewees across the sectors did not necessarily subscribe to this point of view.

Many business interviewees said they were working on a strategic approach using volunteering as one part of a structured, long-term relationship with community organisations, supporting them through funding and different types of volunteering programmes as outlined by the quotes from Deloitte and National Grid. They seek to offer a range of volunteering opportunities to their staff

matching their talents and motivations to community needs; however, they acknowledged that striking this balance was not an easy endeavour.

Similarly, community organisations asserted that they needed skills-based and practical support from volunteers. There is an increased need for capacity-building in the voluntary sector matched by many employers' interest in skills-based volunteering. However, community organisations stressed that this needs to be matched by financial resources to enable them to implement and drive these projects within their organisations. Many of these types of capacity-building projects often require longer-term partnerships and are more resource-intensive, both for the employer and the community organisations. Some community organisations also raised the questions of trust, e.g. trusting a volunteer to look at their accounts or developing their IT systems, especially if on short-term placements. They also questioned whether they would be able to maintain the systems put in place by volunteers, unless it was part of a longer-term project.

The difficulty of defining skills-based volunteering and a need for more advice for all sectors was a common theme raised by the research, such as, whether it refers to soft/natural skills or professional skills; existing skills or something an employee wants to learn. Several interviewees added that they perceive skills-based volunteering to have a cyclical nature. Especially brokers acknowledged that they used to organise more skills-based volunteering programmes until the demand turned more towards practical volunteering, usually in teams. Gennie Franklin, Business in the Community (BitC) recalls:

*Five years ago, 99 per cent of team challenges were physical, gardening, painting. Now it's more 60 per cent with 40 per cent being skills-based or individual and this percentage will be much higher if you include the work of our Business Connectors. Over ten years ago when BITC brokered employees into communities it was skills based programme and the trend's is now coming back round; it's not new."*

Rob Compton, Business Development Manager at Timebank asserted:

*We need to think differently and innovatively about employee volunteering. It's simplistic to think of it as only individual/skilled or team/ unskilled. I hear a lot about 'Stop painting classrooms and volunteering as teams.' But if you are consulting the school kids and then decorating the classroom according to their ideas you have added another layer.*

### **Volunteering: A Free Resource?**

All brokers and community organisation interviewees underlined the necessity for understanding the importance of volunteer management and implicit costs. As supported by this community organisation interviewee: *"My biggest bugbear is that volunteer management never gets recognised. Volunteer management is highly skilled and intrinsically is not free."*

Private and public sector interviewees commonly shared fears about the effects of the economy on EV. One CSR consultancy interviewee stated, *"The effect of the cuts has been more on the supply side because some charities have gone or are less able to manage volunteers."* Many interviewees voiced concern that community organisations they rely on to facilitate EV programmes, assist with training, bureaucracy and brokering and community organisations that provide venues for employees to volunteer will have to close, or will not be able to function at their previous capacity, and long-term partnerships will end.

### **Brokers: Do We Need Them?**

According to Volunteering England, “more than 50% of employers prefer to use an ESV broker to help them identify volunteering opportunities and community partners.”<sup>16</sup> Interviewees across all sectors were clear that the future of EV and CSR needs brokers. CSR representatives acknowledged that they could neither envisage having the capacity, as they are also experiencing funding cuts, nor expertise to deliver certain programmes in-house.

Interviewees from all sectors had a utopian vision where EV is sustainable and occurs without CSR departments, brokers or community organisation volunteer coordinators, and EV is embedded in corporate culture. Several interviewees from brokers and CSR departments of businesses acknowledged that ideally they would work themselves out of a job; however, while we are nowhere near to achieving this we can extract best practise out of our experience and the research.

## **Conclusions and Recommendations**

Reviewing the literature and garnering opinions of interviewees have revealed a wealth of cross-sector knowledge, skills and enthusiasm for making EV more accessible and meaningful to all businesses, employees and community organisations.

This report recommends the following points for consideration:

### **For All:**

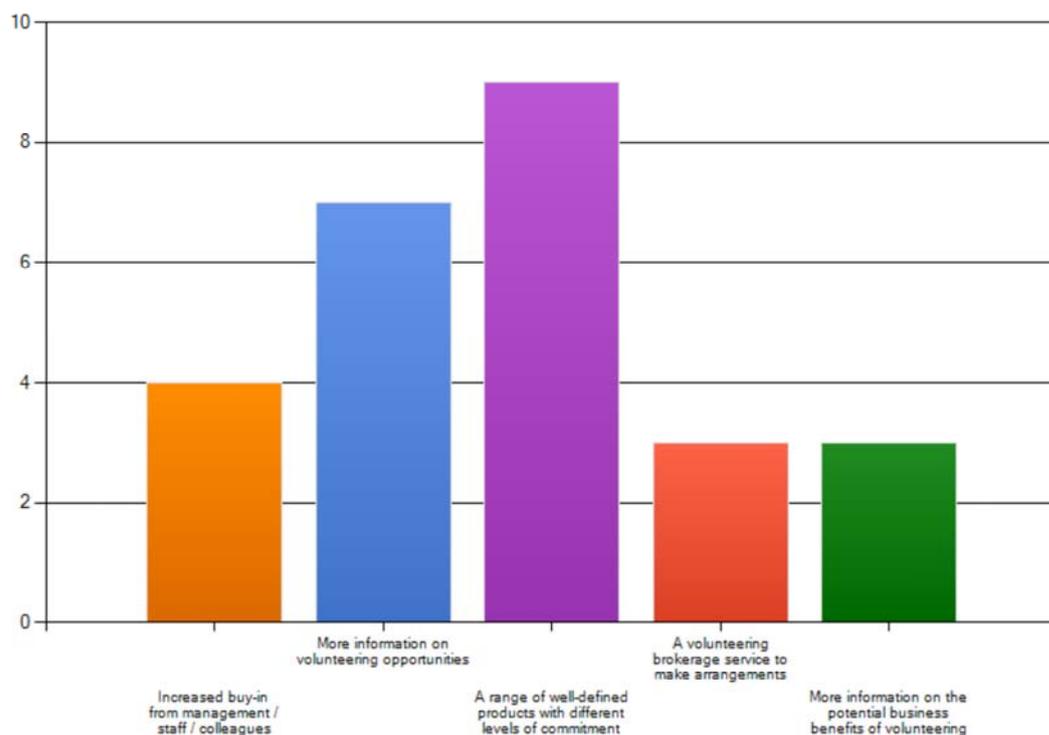
- *Increase cross-sector understanding:* Increased communication and understanding is needed, for example, regarding expectations and realities of EV – management, training, monitoring and measurement, accountability and the inherent costs for all parties; and EV and funding opportunities available;
- *Publicise EV opportunities and associated benefits, sharing best practice and innovation;*
- *Consider how to make SMEs more ‘EV-ready’:*

Suggestions for how to increase SME EV engagement as identified by SME survey respondents:

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<sup>16</sup> Volunteering England (2011) *The Practical Guide to Employer Supported Volunteering for Employers*. Accessed: <http://www.volunteering.org.uk/resources/esv-resource-hub/guides>

### What would help you become more involved in volunteering?



- Brokers to offer a variety of price structures so that SMEs can pick and choose which services they require;
- Undertake EV in a cluster with other local SMEs: *“Smaller businesses could volunteer with their supply chain or micro-volunteer without leaving their offices. It’s important to match the skill set of the SME to the community organisation for full benefit and valuable, sustainable relationships,”*<sup>17</sup>
- Larger businesses to offer support and highlight the business case: *“Corporates could share information and EV advice with suppliers, creating a value chain and longer term partnerships,”*<sup>18</sup>
- Recognise existing SME volunteering and mutual benefits: *Most [SMEs] don’t realise that they have responsible business practice when they do it. They don’t measure it and they don’t see the business benefit of it. They do it because it’s the right thing to do, the right way to operate. I told businesses I work with that it’s ok to have a business benefit from community activities.*<sup>19</sup>

#### For community organisations:

- *Better and more confident definition of needs:* make needs more explicit to brokers, employee volunteers and businesses and ensure that they get the most useful support;
- *Communication and management of expectations* is crucial for meaningful and effective EV in a number of ways:
  - 1) Employee volunteers should understand the purpose and needs of the community organisations prior to starting a placement in order to personally invest and see the value in the community organisation’s work and allotted tasks;
  - 2) Volunteers’ expectations of what they can achieve must be managed – some may expect to see immediate significant impact and that is not always possible;
  - 3) An EV placement needs to be well-planned and well-communicated so that all parties are aware of what to expect. For example, volunteers may be used to a different way or pace of working and managing that can be resource intensive.

<sup>17</sup> Stephen Melanophy, Director of Private Banking, Lloyds Banking Group and BitC Business Connector

<sup>18</sup> Javier Santoyo, Corporate Relationships Manager, NCVO

<sup>19</sup> Tony Jenkins-Jones, Community Relations Manager, E.ON and BitC Business Connector

- *Develop a strategic approach to EV and a position/policy vis-à-vis businesses:* actively seek to approach businesses that match the community organisation's needs and strategic aims;
- *Develop corporate understanding and business drivers for the private sector's engagement in EV:* "It is not how much firms give and to whom, but why they give. What is their business rationale in each case?"<sup>20</sup>

#### **For Businesses:**

- *Provide 'employer-supported' volunteering opportunities:* ensure employees feel supported by their managers and the business as a whole to take up EV opportunities. Research and interviewees underlined the importance of business and managerial support, infrastructure provision, and internal promotion of EV as a key part of CSR and core business strategy;
- *Offer a variety of different volunteering opportunities matching employees' talents and personal motivations;*
- *Build consultation with community organisations into the CSR strategy development process;*
- *Be flexible and open to (new) ideas from community organisations;*
- *Utilise and listen to brokers for their expert knowledge, skills and understanding of community organisations, community needs, and developing partnerships that are the right fit for all parties.*

#### **For Brokers:**

- *Develop EV toolkits for employers and community organisations without reinventing the wheel;*
- *Educate businesses about real community needs and the financial costs of EV;*
- *Develop more opportunities for community organisations and businesses to develop longer-term partnerships.*

#### **For Government:**

- *Acknowledge and celebrate existing volunteering initiatives;*
- *Acknowledge that volunteering is not a free resource, but has inherent costs.*

## **Thank you**

This report would not have been possible without the invaluable support and input from all interviewees and our CSV colleagues. Special thanks to Deloitte Community Investment for hosting the report launch event on 18<sup>th</sup> March 2013.

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<sup>20</sup> Deloitte (2011) *More Than Just Giving: Analysis of Corporate Responsibility Across UK Firms*. Accessed: [www.deloitte.com/assets/Dcom.../uk-gps-more-than-just-giving.pdf](http://www.deloitte.com/assets/Dcom.../uk-gps-more-than-just-giving.pdf)