

Topic 3 | Business & education

One major change that has taken place in volunteering in the past 25 years has been the rise of third parties. Third parties have their own instrumental interests (private access) in having their “members” volunteer. “Members” include the usual examples: companies with employee volunteering, schools/universities with civic internships and service learning, and social services with reciprocity requirements. A “part of the public” (*public access*) refers to the broader population. Examples include national days of service (e.g., NLDoet, Mandela Day, MLK Day) and specific groups (e.g., family volunteering, dating volunteering, green exercise, and “prescription well-being”).

Third parties

Third parties make a fundamental change to the process of volunteer management. First, traditional volunteers and third-party volunteers are the results of different resources. In a study by Koolen-Maas and colleagues (2022), this difference is compared to the distinction between wild salmon and farmed fish, with volunteers differing in terms of 1) how they are manifested in various types of volunteering; (2) the objectives that they serve; (3) their volunteering antecedents; and (4) the ways in which they are harvested by different stakeholders, who meet different conditions. Further, “farmed fish” (third-party volunteers) also require a specific form of management based on 1) advantages and challenges; (2) resource levels; and (4) sustainability (Maas et al., 2022; see Table 1). Second, instead of unitary volunteer management, third-party volunteering requires shared volunteer management. In shared volunteer management, one organization is responsible for access to volunteers (e.g., a company, a school, a dating agency) and another organization is responsible for directing the volunteers (Van Overbeeke, 2019). The former is known as the “sending organization” or “home organization.” The latter is the “receiving organization” or “host organization.”

Third parties often, but not always, provide episodic volunteering, with a clear beginning and end. An intervention by a third party can also lead to regular volunteering, as could occur when volunteering is linked to a healthier lifestyle (e.g., [green exercise](#) or [prescription well-being](#)) or long-term participation (e.g., reciprocity requirements). Furthermore, episodic

volunteering can be transformed into regular ongoing commitment through two different approaches. The best known is the “relay,” in which each team performs essentially the same tasks, thus “passing the baton,” as it were. For example, the Dutch organization *Jarige Job* assembles birthday boxes, each time for a different group. If a corporate team participates for PR purposes, the organization is likely to take a large number of photos and post them on social media. If a team participates as a team-building activity, the organization is likely to ensure that as many different people as possible work together. If a team of singles participates on Valentine’s Day, a large party might be organized at the end. If the team consists of the NGO management from a business school, the introduction might include more emphasis on management than on the necessity of the organization. The key is for every team to perform the same tasks, while making subtle adjustments to the context. In the “string-of-pearls” variant, each volunteer (or group of volunteers) builds on the work of the previous volunteers with the goal of ultimately achieving a result. Examples include Wikipedia and other “knowledge commons,” in which volunteers add to and improve each other’s work; a group of experts collaborating to write a policy plan for an organization; and a construction project in which different groups take over for each other.

The relay and string-of-pearls variants of episodic volunteering are also good for substantiating the legitimacy of an organization, as they generate a major increase in the number of people involved that organization. Third parties can also be quite interesting for volunteering related to specific occupations/professions. Within this context, people consciously deploy their professional skills, often with the goal of developing them. One good example involves mediators (or mediator trainees) volunteering in a neighborhood mediation service.

Instrumental goals

Third parties have their own instrumental objectives with regard to volunteering (see Meijs & Koolen-Maas, 2022). For some third parties, these objectives are relatively clear. For example, dating volunteering is oriented toward finding a partner, family volunteering is oriented toward quality time and “raising” one’s children to volunteer, and green exercise is oriented toward achieving physical health. The situation is more complicated in the case of companies and educational institutions.

Companies can have a variety of objectives for their employee volunteering. Familiar goals include the company's general reputation, at times with a clear commercial goal or a less obvious public-affairs goal. These objectives are well suited to employee volunteering that is organized by top management or within the context of corporate social responsibility (CSR)/socially responsible enterprise, or marketing departments. A second well-known goal is oriented toward the development of individual employees (comparable to service learning) or of teams (i.e., team-building). These types of programs often emerge from the area of HRM. In more abstract terms, top management or HRM departments may have objectives relating to company pride or employee commitment. Another relevant question concerns whether employee volunteering is driven from the perspective of the company or that of the employee. The employee perspective often offers a greater chance of including existing volunteering, which the company then facilitates. True leaders in this regard have company-driven programs (e.g., for trainees) and employee-driven programs (e.g., for older employees).

In the contact with companies, the first question should be which entrance to take: HRM, socially responsible enterprise, marketing, or an individual employee. The second question concerns how an instrumental reward for the organization (which could be as simple as a satisfied employee) can be linked to the commitment of an employee (for a longer period) or a succession of teams (as a relay or string of pearls)? Finally, an instrumental reward is often not needed in order to persuade a point of contact—in many cases, they just want to help. It is nevertheless helpful to the point of contact to explain the activities to the base of support within the company, thereby making it sustainable.

As is the case with companies, the initiative in educational settings can come either from the institution's educational management or from an individual instructor. In the educational sector, there are roughly three variants: civic internship, service learning, and training internship. In a civic internship (often in secondary school), the focus is on doing. The school has a target number of service hours, and students perform largely concrete activities that, as a rule, they are already capable of performing, with the receiving organization taking the lead. In service learning (often at the post-secondary level), the focus is on learning. The degree program (or, in many cases, a specific course) has learning objectives that can be achieved by performing very precisely defined volunteering, with the program taking the lead.

As a rule, students perform activities that they are not already capable of doing. Because they are aimed at learning, however, they are very serious. In a training internship, the focus is on refining professional competences that, as a rule, the student already possesses. It is up to the receiving organization to determine whether a training stage is to be counted as volunteering.

Schools, as well as companies (trainees often participate in employee volunteering designed especially for them as part of their socialization into the company) offer good opportunities for introducing young people to social issues (e.g., poverty). Such experiences are thus also an investment in the future of volunteering and social involvement.

Costs and benefits to the host organization

Managing volunteers is not free. Separating volunteer management between a sending/home organization and a receiving/host organization changes the cost-benefit structure for both organizations. For receiving organizations, the use of companies and schools is not free. In addition to the costs of supervision, which can sometimes be higher than for “regular” volunteers, there are costs associated with the “reward,” as each of the third parties has its own instrumental goals—objectives that must be achieved during or through volunteering at the receiving organization. For example, it is probably necessary to devote considerably more time to service-learning students, even though the outcome is not completely certain. Similarly, organizations might create team-building for companies that would otherwise not take place: they are fun, but not necessary. These higher costs are offset by significantly lower recruitment costs if they succeed in establishing a long-term relationship with the company or educational institution. Although the initial conversation takes time, if a good relay or string of pearls is devised and agreed upon, it can work very efficiently.

Very relevant to recruitment, the involvement of a third party can significantly reduce the opportunity cost for volunteers. In such a case, volunteering does not come at the expense of other activities. This widens the availability for volunteering in the volunteer’s schedule. In addition, pressure from the third party (e.g., “At our company, this is what we do”) can increase the willingness to engage in volunteering.

Reading list for these topics:

- 1 Conceptualizing volunteering as a natural resource
Koolen-Maas, S. A., Meijs, L. C. P. M., van Overbeeke, P. S. M., & Brudney, J. L. (2022). Rethinking volunteering as a natural resource: A conceptual typology. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 0(0). <https://doi.org/10.1177/08997640221127947> Open Access
- 2 PEP Den Haag has charted the new management competences that volunteer coordinators need for working with third parties. [Read here](#)
- 3 A blog in response to an article on volunteer management
Van Overbeeke (2019). *Vrijwilligersmanager, jouw context vraagt een eigen model [Volunteer manager, your context calls for its own model]*. [Read here](#)
- 4 The distinction between third-party and independent volunteering can lead to different behavior on the part of volunteer managers (at a food bank), as investigated by Annamijn de Jong in a Master's thesis. [Read here](#)
- 5 Mandatory volunteering through third parties can have disadvantages. This was the focus of the thesis by Shalini Sewradj. [Read here](#)
- 6 A diversity of contributions on the social involvement of companies, mostly from the corporate perspective, are available under the headings of "companies," "social organizations," and "blogs and media." [Read here](#)
- 7 Recording by Dr Stephanie Koolen-Maas on "De kans van (filantropisch) samenwerken met bedrijven - vanuit wetenschappelijk perspectief" ["The likelihood of (philanthropic) cooperation with companies: From a scientific perspective] during the NOV (Dutch association of volunteer organizations) knowledge booster week in November 2021. [View here](#)
- 8 The true academic work is the doctoral dissertation by Lonneke Roza, who is now putting her knowledge into practice at NN, a major insurance company in the Netherlands.
Roza, L. (2016). *Employee engagement in corporate social responsibility*. ERIM / Erasmus University, Rotterdam, Netherlands (No. EPS-2016-396-ORG): [Read here](#) (Open Access)
- 9 On the advantages and disadvantages of instrumental volunteering for civil society.
Meijs, L., & Koolen-Maas, S. (2022). Civil society and (re) embedding volunteering. In *A research agenda for civil society* (pp. 161-172). Edward Elgar Publishing. <https://www.elgaronline.com/view/book/9781800378155/book-part-9781800378155-20.xml> (open access)