



# **SKILLS-BASED VOLUNTEERING**

How can it work for you?

CSR<sup>ASIA</sup> | Research

# SKILLS-BASED VOLUNTEERING

*How can it work for you?*

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# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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The following people generously shared their experiences and expert insights on skills-based volunteering (SBV) via interview. We are very grateful for their contributions.

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We also drew on the discussions that took place at a meeting of the CSR Asia Community Investment Round Table in Hong Kong in April 2013. We greatly appreciate the participation of all CIRT members and the guest attendees who shared their insights.

## ABOUT THIS PAPER

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This paper was inspired by conversations arising from CSR Asia's Community Investment Round Table (CIRT). The CIRT is made up of companies who share best practices and challenges concerning strategic community investment and are committed to measuring their impact in this area. Skills-based volunteering (SBV) is an area of growing interest and CIRT members at various stages of their SBV 'journey' were keen to understand more about how to maximise its effectiveness.

This paper, available to CIRT members, CSR Asia Strategic Partners and research contributors, aims to address the ways in which SBV can be most effective, focusing on the practicalities of engaging volunteers in programmes and initiatives that have positive impacts. Following the publication of this

paper, we will continue to collect and share SBV-related tools and templates by way of resource for those embarking on their own journey. You can access these materials in the Strategic Partner area of the CSR Asia website<sup>1</sup>.

In this relatively nascent field, there are few hard-and-fast 'answers' available. Whilst interest is growing, many companies still face challenges in delivering successful SBV programmes. This paper therefore takes an honest look at those challenges, sharing insights, case studies and learning rather than offering definitive answers. It is based on research and interviews with representatives from corporations, NGOs and intermediaries. It is written primarily with a corporate audience in mind, but we hope it will be useful for NGOs as well.

<sup>1</sup> To log-in, go to <http://csr-asia.com/log-in.php>

# FOREWORD

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**CALLUM DOUGLAS**  
**PwC – CSR Asia CIRT Corporate Chair**

Through discussions among the members of the Community Investment Round Table (CIRT), it has become clear that skills-based volunteering (SBV) is a topic of growing importance to the members and to those involved in community investment programmes as a whole. This paper captures the content of those discussions and provides informed and balanced guidance on how to approach SBV.

While several members are involved in SBV, and some have excellent examples to share of successful, high impact projects, for many, we're at the beginning of this transition.

Across the region, PwC network firms have been following the trend towards SBV, which now accounts for between 5% and 65% of total volunteer efforts depending on the territory. PwC is committed to providing SBV opportunities for our people and communities and this paper provides us with encouragement and inspiration to make this happen.

While there is a general consensus that increasing SBV is the right thing to do, there is an acknowledgement that it's not easy to achieve. There are concerns that including more SBV programmes as part of community investment strategies could result in lower people engagement rates. Some are also very conscious of the cultural gap between NGOs and their corporate partners, which can present

challenges in terms of scoping a project, matching volunteers with appropriate skills, and the level of understanding of the unique challenges faced by NGOs.

There are also different challenges depending on the markets in which members operate, with different skills needed in different places to effectively match with local realities. Of course, some people simply prefer to volunteer in something totally removed from what they do day-in, day-out at work.

The advantages of well managed, inclusive SBV programmes are however becoming clear. Higher impact can be achieved which is good for the beneficiary organisations and can also help tell a great story of a company's community investment programme. The development of new skills, honing of existing skills, and the benefit of working 'out of your comfort zone' are just a few.

This paper addresses these matters and many more, and serves as a toolkit of sorts for practitioners, those interested in engaging in SBV, and those who want to make the case for SBV in their organisation. We also hope it will be useful for NGOs and others involved in SBV to understand some of the needs, challenges and opportunities of SBV from their own perspective.



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CALLUM DOUGLAS  
Corporate Responsibility, Asia Pacific – PwC  
CSR Asia Community Investment Round Table (CIRT) Corporate Chair

# FOREWORD

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**RICHARD WELFORD**  
CSR Asia

The increasing interest in skills-based volunteering (SBV) is emblematic of the wider shift towards CSR becoming more strategic and embedded for businesses. This report was compiled because of the increasing focus on SBV by members of our Community Investment Round Table (CIRT) and Strategic Partner programme, and a desire to bring together current thinking in an accessible and practical way.

At CSR Asia our CIRT and Strategic Partner programme are central to our mission: they enable ambitious organisations to share best practices and collaborate on areas of interest in CSR. Our Strategic Partner programme connects leading companies in the region and provides support for their sustainability journeys. The CIRT is a subset of Strategic Partners who are particularly focused on measuring and improving the impact of their community investment initiatives - and for many, SBV is of growing significance in their portfolio of work.

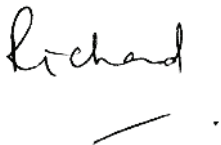
I believe that SBV holds tremendous potential for companies to make a positive and lasting impact on both the communities in which they operate and their own employees. This paper includes numerous examples which highlight the benefits of carefully planned programmes: from the staff who hone existing skills and

develop new ones, to the community partners who benefit from a company tackling a tough problem with a fresh perspective and a corporate tool-box.

At the same time SBV comes with many challenges. The time required to identify genuine needs in the community, and the intensity of resources needed to successfully manage SBV programmes, are just two of these.

Each company will also have to make its own decisions about the right balance between traditional time-based volunteering and skills-based initiatives. We hope that the perspectives shared in this paper may help this process.

I am grateful to our CIRT members and other contributors for sharing their insights, expertise and experiences on this topic. This report draws on those experiences, drawing out the practical steps that companies wishing to begin or expand their SBV programmes can take. Of course, in an emerging field, many questions remain. We hope that this report marks the start of an enduring conversation between our CIRT members and Strategic Partners. As ever we welcome your feedback and suggestions for the future.



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RICHARD WELFORD  
Chairman, CSR Asia

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Skills-based volunteering (SBV) uses the skills, knowledge, experiences, talents and expertise of employees and matches them with the needs of communities, social businesses, local governments and not for profit organisations. SBV involves staff volunteers working on projects that create positive impacts for beneficiaries through a structured programme, developed and managed by their employer.

Within this, we can broadly define a spectrum of activities that can constitute SBV:

## Consultancy and capacity building

Perhaps the most common type of SBV, this involves volunteers contributing by approaching an issue/problem with a 'business mentality'. This can range from a one-off strategic review project, to a one-on-one mentoring relationship at a senior level.

## Specific professional skills

Volunteers provide manual skills (e.g. electrical services, truck driving) or non-manual skills (e.g. legal advice, book-keeping or IT). These SBV activities are closely linked to the volunteer's specific workplace skills

## Direct services to partner beneficiaries

Activities focusing on beneficiaries, rather than the NGO. Common examples include mentoring entrepreneurs or delivering life- skills workshops to youth. Resembles traditional volunteering but requires skills such as coaching abilities or English language skills.

The distinction between SBV and other types of volunteering is not clear-cut. Broadly, SBV is distinguished from 'traditional' or 'time-based' volunteering because for the latter, the actual volunteering activities do not require specific skills to complete. So, if a last minute substitution were made with willing corporate volunteers from an entirely different industry or company, the ability to complete the voluntary tasks would not be significantly affected.

### WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF SBV?

The increasing interest in SBV is driven primarily by its potential to have a significant, positive and lasting impact on both the community and the business.

#### BENEFITS TO THE BUSINESS INCLUDE:

- **Employee engagement** – SBV gives employees the opportunity to contribute

meaningfully to the community. Both anecdotal accounts and an increasing amount of research point to a positive impact on both employee recruitment and retention.

- **Ability to report on positive impacts** – SBV often engenders a deeper relationship with the beneficiary organisation, leading to greater impact. Reporting on this has significant reputational benefits.

- **Employee skills development** – employees can learn new skills and improve existing ones. The benefits are often enhanced having to apply skills in a time and resource-poor environment.

- **Exploring the relevance of social issues to the business** – this may be through engaging with NGOs who work on issues relevant to a company's customers, or international

volunteering may even provide the impetus for a new inclusive business strategy.

#### **BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY INCLUDE:**

- **Increased capacity** – a fundamental tenet of much of SBV. A focus on capacity building usually maximises the potential for long-term impact over and above a one-off service delivery.
- **A different perspective** – as well as offering specific skills.
- **The multiplier effect** – due to the deeper connection with the NGO's organisational model, volunteers may be better placed to facilitate useful meetings, funding opportunities or other contributions that enable the NGO to achieve its mission.

The backdrop to these potential benefits is the cultural gap that can exist between corporates and NGOs and other community organisations. Businesses must take care to cultivate an equitable relationship, and to remember the (often constrained) context within which NGOs are operating.

#### **WHAT MAKES A SBV PROGRAMME SUCCESSFUL?**

The report provides (through case studies) discussion, research findings and 'top tips' for the various stages of setting up and implementing SBV programmes. It addresses programme management, identifying the right partner, identifying needs, finding the right volunteers, matching volunteers with opportunities, managing expectations, monitoring and evaluating, and assessing impact. Key success factors include:

- **Dedicated project management.** A SBV programme needs time and resources, and someone to manage not only the programme, but also to support the volunteers and the partners.

- **'Skills' considered in their broadest context.**

The corporate 'perspective' (i.e. the business approach) may be just as valuable as specific skills.

- **An open dialogue between partners.** It may be best to start with NGOs with whom the company has a trusted relationship; in any case significant time will be needed upfront to establish the terms of the engagement and ensure benefits are shared.

- **Expectations are carefully managed on both sides.** Addressing the 'soft' side of the engagement can really help ensure the overall effectiveness of the programme.

- **Impact is measured.** Evaluating the benefits to both business and community is only possible with measurement.

#### **WHAT NEXT FOR SBV?**

Due to the resource intensity of SBV programmes, taking SBV to scale in companies presents challenges. The benefits of traditional volunteering undoubtedly remain, but many companies are keen to at least increase the proportion of SBV that they do, and some are already managing this successfully. To enable this, it will be important to continue to share best practice and lessons learned from both sides of the corporate-community partnership. CSR Asia will continue to engage with its Strategic Partners and Community Investment Round Table members to identify best practices and learn from the experiences of successful SBV programmes.



- The full report, including case studies and advice for implementation, is available to Community Investment Round Table members and CSR Asia Strategic Partners. For more information on joining, email [cirt@csr-asia.com](mailto:cirt@csr-asia.com) or visit [www.csr-asia.com](http://www.csr-asia.com).

- The CSR Asia Community Investment Round Table (CIRT) is a member-based, regional platform which builds and advocates best practices for corporate community investment in Asia in order to help companies make a lasting positive impact in their communities. Through its network of members and experts, the CIRT plays an active role to share best practices and improve company impacts on the community. Membership is open to companies and corporate foundations who are a Strategic Partner of CSR Asia.

- The CSR Asia Strategic Partner Programme connects leading companies across Asia who share best practices and challenges in CSR. Partners collaborate on areas of interest and build a network of peers in their industry and beyond.