

Workshop Presentation Topic: Corporate Volunteering

Corporate Volunteering: Expertise and Creativity

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Abstract

Mr. KS YEUNG, Convenor of the "Sub-committee on Promotion of Corporate Volunteering" under the "Steering Committee on Promotion of Volunteer Service", would like to share his experiences in devising and implementation of the promotional strategies and activities to encourage corporations in Hong Kong to join volunteering. Representatives of three winning teams of the "Corporate Volunteer Service Project Competition 2005" will also share their rewarding experience in organizing the award-winning projects.

Introduction

1. With the mission to build Hong Kong into a more caring and harmonious society, the Social Welfare Department ("SWD") of the HKSAR Government has since 1998 been actively promoting volunteer service in collaboration with various sectors through the advocacy of the Volunteer Movement. The business sector has been one of the targets of these promotional efforts which aim to enhance the corporations' social responsibility through corporate volunteering.

2. In this workshop, I would briefly present our efforts and achievement in promoting corporate volunteering in the past seven years; then, we have the honour to have the representatives of three renowned corporate volunteer teams to present their award-winning service projects to illustrate how Hong Kong corporations have made use of their expertise and creativity to serve the community.

Corporate volunteering in Hong Kong

3. Corporate volunteering is not new in Hong Kong. Traditionally, local merchants have adopted a charity mind to serve the underprivileged through various

means, including voluntary work. In the late 1980s', the concept of corporate social responsibility was brought-in by international corporations. As corporate volunteering relies heavily on the initiative of the owners or top management of the corporations, its development has been comparatively slow, as compared with the development of volunteering in other sectors.

4. In 1998, the then Chief Executive put forth his vision to encourage our citizens to take greater part in volunteer work, so as to contribute to building up a more caring community. (Cf: The 1998 Policy Address - Policy Objective) Subsequently, the "Steering Committee on Promotion of Volunteer Services" (the "Steering Committee"), chaired by the Director of Social Welfare of the HKSAR Government, was formed to devise the overall strategies to promote volunteerism in Hong Kong. Under its auspices, the "Sub-committee on Promotion of Corporate Volunteering" (the "Sub-committee"), comprising representatives from the senior management of major corporations in Hong Kong, is tasked to devise strategies and tailor-made publicity efforts to promote corporate volunteering.

Promotional strategies

5. In the past seven years, we have adopted the following specific strategies to promote volunteerism in corporations :

- widely involve the business sector in strategic planning
- soliciting support from the top management of corporations
- providing consultancy services to middle management of corporations
- bridging the business sector with the third sector (i.e. non-government organisations ("NGOs") running welfare services)
- facilitating the formation and experience sharing among corporate volunteer teams
- setting up a central volunteer recognition system.

Widely involve the business sector in strategic planning

6. Traditional, social work personnel plays key roles in the promotion and implementation of volunteer services. Most social workers however do not fully comprehend the characteristics and operation of the business sector. To bridge this knowledge gap, personnel from a wide array of businesses have been appointed as the members of the Steering Committee and the Sub-committee. Not only has this strategy succeeded in bringing the views of the business sector into the institution, it has also enabled the business sector to gain ownership of corporate volunteering. Currently, I am serving as a member of the Steering Committee and also the Convenor of the Sub-committee, and have the honour to work along with representatives from

ten corporations as well as ten personnel from the welfare sector. We have interesting meetings where exciting new ideas are exchanged and synergy sparkles spontaneously.

Soliciting support from the top management of corporations

7. Top management is the core focus of our promotion work in the first few years. The development of corporate volunteering in a corporation relies heavily on the commitment and support of the top management. With the blessing from top management, the volunteer teams can make use of the corporate's tangible and intangible resources to facilitate its development. Therefore, we have adopted the strategy to start up the momentum by bringing the concept of "corporate social responsibility" and corporate volunteering to the owners, boards of directors and senior management of corporations. To illustrate the Government's strong belief and support in corporate volunteering, we have organised high-profiled seminars for CEOs of corporations in 2001 and 2002, which were officiated by our Financial Secretary.

Providing consultancy services to the middle management of corporations

8. When the top management of the business sector is more ready to accept the concept of corporate volunteering, we have since 2003 started to shift our focus towards providing practical assistance to the corporations to organise their own volunteering activities, with the middle management of corporations as our main targets. In this regard, the "Central Office for Volunteer Service" ("COVS") of the SWD has been providing one-stop consultancy services, from actualizing the concept of corporate volunteering into the corporation's specific trade, starting-up its volunteer services (usually by its own corporate volunteer team), identifying service opportunities, sustaining participation of the volunteers, to giving advices on volunteer management and the setting up of a recognition system, etc.

9. At the same time, a mentor scheme was set up to match newly formed corporate volunteer teams with more experienced, "matured" corporate volunteer teams. Not only have the mentors being providing useful and practical advices to the new teams, some of them would even jointly plan and carry out volunteering programmes with the new teams so that they could speedily stand on their own.

Bridging the business sector with the third sector

10. Service matching is a crucial element for the success of corporate volunteering. Since the business sector is not familiar with the social service organizations, and vice versa, bridging between the two sectors is hence indispensable. As mentioned before, the composition of the Sub-committee has facilitated exchange of expertise and synergy between the two sectors. Members from both sectors would readily match service-opportunities with volunteer teams, and among themselves. At the same time, the COVS plays the important role of match-making, based on the specific service mission, expertise, expectation, and experience of the corporate volunteer teams, as well as the service opportunities available in the NGOs.

11. Successful service matching means not only to materialize one service opportunity but also means the building up of a cross-sector connection between the two organisations for further collaboration in the future in serving the community. We have therefore actively promoted the concept of long term partnership among corporations and NGOs, especially for those newly formed corporate volunteer teams, matching with an experienced NGO will much enhance their development.

12. Communication is a two-way business, therefore, in parallel, efforts have also been made to help the welfare sector to have better understanding in the business sector, as well as to acquire the skills in working with them. Through this process of collaboration, we are very happy to see that the two sectors have enriched and enlightened each other.

Facilitating the formation and experience sharing among corporate volunteer teams

13. Setting up and managing a corporate volunteer team may perhaps be a challenging task for some middle managers. They may need to acquire new knowledge and new skills to be able to accomplish the task. Moreover, there are common concerns and difficulties which may require consensus building and joint actions of the business sector. One good example is the issue around whether insurance should be taken out for the volunteers during activities organised by the corporate volunteer team. To address these issues, the Sub-committee has set up workforces to deliberate on them. Earlier this year, two workforces were set up to examine, respectively, insurance coverage for corporate volunteer teams, and training need of management of corporate volunteer team. After having thoroughly examined the issues, the workforces recommended strategies and options to the Sub-committee, which were adopted subsequently and launched for action.

14. Sharing of experience is the best way for improvement. The Sub-committee has established various platforms and occasions for experience sharing among corporations and also with the welfare sector. These include the Volunteer Movement website, Newsletters on Corporate Volunteering and regular Seminars on Corporate Volunteering. We have distributed the newsletters to all corporations with over 100 employees on regular basis so as to keep them posted of the momentum.

Setting up a central volunteer recognition system

15. The Steering Committee has set up a multi-tier centralized volunteers recognition system for individual volunteers and participating organisations (including corporations) in quantitative and qualitative terms. A certificate jointly signed by our Volunteer-in-chief and Chairman of the Steering Committee is awarded to each organisation which has provided 300 or more service hours in the previous year.

16. To best suit the interest of the business sector, the “Highest Service Hours (Private Organization) Award” is awarded in accordance with the size of the

corporation to recognize corporations which have accumulated the highest service hours in one calendar year. Qualitative-wise, the “Corporate Volunteer Service Project Competition” is held bi-annually to recognize innovative service projects. Both these awards are presented at the Annual Volunteer Award Presentation Ceremony which is officiated by the Volunteer-in-Chief and senior HKSARG officials. Not only have these awards, and the high profile presentation ceremony successful in demonstrating the community's recognition to the corporations as well as other organizations / individual volunteers, they also serve to promote volunteering as a life-style to the public, so as to attract more individuals and corporations to join volunteering.

Conclusion

17. The business sector in Hong Kong has shown their warm welcome to the concept of corporate volunteering. Putting thoughts into action, we keep our finger on the pulse of the business sector and provide tailor-made and practical assistance on operational matters. In 2005-06, the Sub-committee has devised its promotion strategies as followed

- To sustain the devotion of the corporations by **recognizing** their contribution and **publicizing** their commitment in volunteering;
- To cultivate a **sharing** atmosphere among corporate volunteer teams;
- To solicit the assistance from welfare organizations to provide more tailor-made **support** to corporations to facilitate them to join volunteering; and
- To develop **resources** to support those corporations interested in volunteering to form volunteer teams.

18. Looking back, Hong Kong went through a difficult time in face of the economic restructuring, Asian financial turmoil and SARS when we stepped into the 21st Century. Despite all odds, Hong Kong people join and act together, revitalize their energy to take on the challenges and move forward during the critical time. Among others, the business sector has made creative use of their innovation and resources to serve the community at time of adversity, and has been keeping up such high spirit continuously.

19. It is my honour to share with you that, with the growing awareness on societal responsibility and corporate citizenship, there is a sharp upsurge of corporations forming their volunteer teams in the recent years. Corporations registered in our Volunteer Movement have increased from 44 in 2001 to well over 120 presently. Many of these corporate volunteer teams have served the community for over 10 000 hours per year.

20. Apart from sharing an overview of our work, I would like to show real examples of our achievement. We have the honour to have the winners of our “Corporate Volunteer Service Project Competition 2005 -- Corporate Volunteering: Incorporation of Expertise & Creativity” to share with us their experiences and good practices and inspire us on their creative service ideas.

References

The 1998 Policy Address – Policy Objective, Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government (1998)