The number of companies that support the volunteer efforts of their employees continues to grow. That support comes in many forms, from offering paid time off for employees to volunteer to organizing volunteer activities for employees.

If your company hasn’t yet created a formal program, here are five tips to help you bring employer-supported volunteering to your workplace:

1. **Know your corporate culture.**

   An employer-supported volunteer program is a natural fit for certain organizations. If your colleagues already help the community through food drives or other donation campaigns in their free time, creating a workplace program to support and encourage employee volunteering isn’t a far jump. If your workplace financially supports a cause or community organization, that relationship can be the starting point for an employer-supporting volunteer program.

   Past annual reports and updates on corporate social responsibility can be a great way to learn your organization’s community priorities. Ask colleagues that have been at your workplace for a few years about past community activities and supports.

2. **Gauge support.**

   Find out if your colleagues are interested in volunteering and for what causes. Start with informal conversations and then consider sending out a poll to a wider audience.

   Discuss forming a volunteer committee with your most interested and engaged colleagues. You can share the workload and demonstrate to the decision-makers that there’s a demand.
3. **Learn the limits.**

Employer-supported volunteering requires insurance, health and safety policies, and a budget. The costs associated with community service activities include staff time, refreshments, transportation and financial support for the community partner that organizes the opportunity for both the supplies and their time. Human Resources is a good starting point for getting answers on policies and available budgets.

4. **Make the business case.**

Justify an employer-supported volunteering program with the expected benefits to your workplace. In addition to information you have gathered on interest from your colleagues, include relevant research findings such as:

- Employer-supported volunteering programs help recruit and retain more engaged and skilled employees. Given the choice between two jobs, **68 per cent** of Canadians would choose the one with a strong volunteer culture – and 70 per cent of employees would be more loyal to a workplace that helps them contribute to social and environmental issues.
- Volunteering helps employees learn new skills. According to **92 per cent** of respondents to Deloitte’s 2016 Volunteer IMPACT Study, who were all involved in hiring decisions, volunteering improves professional skills.
- Volunteering together improves company culture. 80 per cent of employer-supported volunteers feel that volunteering as a group strengthens their relationships with their colleagues.
5. Start Small.

Each workplace has its own hierarchy for approval. Start with your supervisor to see if your team can volunteer as a group for a team-building activity. If that goes well, work your way up to include multiple teams or help other teams organize their own group volunteering activities. This shows your leadership team that not only are employees interested in volunteering, they’re motivated to do the work to make it happen (while insuring other business-critical work still gets completed).

Eventually, you could help the company consider a program that includes support for employees to volunteer where they choose, on their own and during work hours. Maybe even start a program that provides donations to non-profits to match employee volunteering hours in their personal time (often called a “Dollars for Doers” program). Skills-based volunteering, such as mentoring, usually requires regular ongoing commitments but are another great contribution of employees’ talents to community, if you can gain company support.

If you can’t get official support for an employer-supported volunteer program but have a group of colleagues that want to give back, consider volunteering outside of work hours. You will still reap the benefits of team building and skills-development, all while helping make a difference in the community.