



**ESTABLISHING  
A BUSINESS  
VOLUNTEER FOR  
THE ARTS®  
PROGRAM  
TOOL-KIT**

# Can a business volunteer program serving nonprofit arts organizations work in your community?

Volunteer programs exist for all levels of engagement including general volunteering (also known as non-skilled or one-off volunteering requiring little to no skill or long-term commitment) and skills-based volunteering (also known as pro bono volunteering). This type of volunteering utilizes a specific skill-set possessed by the volunteer. Often the engagements involve a longer commitment but that's not always the case.

For the purposes of this tool-kit, we will be focusing on skills-based volunteer programs.

The impact of a skills-based program on the work of a nonprofit organization depends closely on effective planning and implementation.

[Business Volunteers for the Arts®](#) is a skills-based management consulting program operated in communities across the United States by partner organizations of Americans for the Arts. It provides in-depth resources for the topics highlighted in this tool-kit including recruitment, screening and assessment procedures, volunteer orientation tools, promotional materials, and management procedures. The BVA national network offers opportunities for communication, best practices and program sharing with other BVA program partners and an annual report on national BVA statistics.

BVA helps create informed friends and advocates from within the business community for nonprofit arts organizations. It is often the first link for a smaller arts group to business resources. It opens the door. For more information about the BVA program, visit our [website](#) or e-mail [privatesector@artsusa.org](mailto:privatesector@artsusa.org).

**"The need for cash is legitimate and undeniable. But it has long been our belief that both corporate donors and nonprofits lose out if pro bono service is not considered part of the philanthropic complement."** [Community—It's Our Business, 2012 Deloitte Pro Bono Report](#)

## How to determine if there is an adequate market:

- ▶ **Define your area of service:** the city, the immediate area, the county, or the region. Are there a sufficient number of nonprofit arts groups with the capacity to use skills-based volunteers to sustain the program?
- ▶ **Establish the need:** Do arts organizations want the program? Convene informational meetings to let groups know that you are considering starting a volunteer program and to tell them how the program works and can benefit them. Find out if there is genuine interest.
- ▶ **Competition:** What types of technical assistance services are already available? It is very important to know what else exists in your area and if these services are meeting the needs of arts groups. Are there other volunteer programs in the community, such as Taproot, Catchafire, Hands on Network, Tech Impact, or state bar associations and/or other legal aid services?
- ▶ **Hone your messages:** Before you approach the business community, be prepared to articulate the mutual benefits of skills-based volunteering for the nonprofit arts sector and the business volunteers and their employers. Draw on experiences in other cities/regions for testimonials, and do your homework to see if a company you are targeting has been active in a similar program elsewhere.
- ▶ **Business interest:** Is there a sufficient pool of business expertise to draw upon to meet the requests for assistance? Meet with chambers of commerce, corporate and community volunteer coordinators, or other business leaders to explain the program concepts and determine interest.



- ▶ **Business leadership:** Is there potential leadership for volunteer programs? Successful business volunteer programs require the involvement of visible and respected business leaders who are committed to bringing business and the arts closer together. They assist with the establishment of the volunteer program, acting in an on-going capacity to promote the program to the community and their peers while assisting with fundraising. Analyze who these people are and if you have the ability to get them involved. You also need to find out if their companies will encourage employees to volunteer and if there are contacts within the companies to help you recruit volunteers.
- ▶ **Financial resources:** Are there sufficient financial resources in the community to sustain a business volunteer program on a long-term basis? Analyze the tradition of giving in the community, particularly from the business community. Which industries and companies have a history of funding community volunteerism and/or the arts? If there is no tradition, is there potential? Are there companies strongly affiliated with your board members, retired board members or major donors which might have the potential to become involved in community activities such as philanthropy, volunteerism, sponsorships or economic development? Volunteer programs are often able to gain business support because of the direct involvement of employees and the fact that businesses see the program as an employee benefit.
- ▶ **Sponsor:** Is there a strong, broad-based organization to host the program? This can be a chamber of commerce or other business association, an arts council, a coalition, a foundation, or an independent organization. Experience has shown that it is easier to establish business volunteer programs within an existing organization, at least initially. This enables lower start-up costs and affiliation with an established organization to help with credibility and basic infrastructure. Since there is such strong interaction with the business community, which usually provides the major financial support for skills-based volunteer programs, it is recommended that the sponsor organization be well connected to business. Also, the sponsor is usually a private, nonprofit agency or has access to such an agency in order to accept tax-exempt contributions on behalf of the program.

## Building a successful skills-based volunteer program needs the following:

- ▶ Professional staff member to run all aspects of the volunteer program.
- ▶ Strong steering committee: The committee should represent a cross-section of sectors including business, arts and culture and other nonprofits. The committee will play a large role in developing the strategy for volunteer recruitment, so it is important to have community-wide support. Include individuals whose personal expertise and connections will strengthen the program.
- ▶ Website:
  - Basic information about your volunteer program including the mission and scope
  - List of types of projects available
  - Links to online applications for interested businesses, volunteers and arts organizations
  - Events and volunteer recognition page
  - List of participating businesses and arts clients
  - Online donation link for your volunteer program
- ▶ Assessment and training of arts organization clients: Each arts organization requesting a volunteer match must be carefully assessed. Skills-based consulting requires a certain amount of infrastructure and planning to be in place for it to be of value. Assessment interviews, workshops and orientation sessions addressing the basic organizational requirements for supporting a skills-based consultant and, how to identify and define the project based on where the client actually is in their process are very important for the success of the program.

- ▶ Volunteer recruitment, screening, selection and orientation process:
  - Recruitment:
    - Contact business funders, steering committee members and ask them to spread the word about your volunteer opportunities in their businesses.
    - Target businesses with the kinds of skills sets your projects most require. Offer to do on-site orientation meetings.
    - Ask to make presentations at chamber of commerce meetings, service club luncheons, community board meetings, and professional organizations.
    - Actively seek involvement of a diverse volunteer pool by approaching professional associations – for instance an Hispanic Chamber of Commerce.
    - Ask your local media to run a news story about the opportunity to become a volunteer.
  - Screening and selection:
    - Conduct a personal interview with every applicant to determine their personality (personal and social traits, work style), preferences and skills.
    - Candidates should have at least 3-5 years of professional work experience.
    - Less experienced candidates can be paired with more senior volunteers.
  - Orientation:
    - This should be a requirement for all nonprofit volunteers. While candidates may have an MBA and years of experience in the private sector, many of the principles that govern the private sector simply do not apply for nonprofit arts organizations. The orientation will define these differences in areas of governance, financial and legal requirements, fundraising, audience and marketing considerations, and strategic priorities.
- ▶ Matching of business volunteers with arts clients based on:
  - Appropriate skills to solve the need – is this the best project for the volunteer’s talent and experience?
  - An interest in the art form represented by the organization?
  - Personality – is there enthusiasm on both sides for the match?
  - Should a team of volunteers be assigned to the project or can one volunteer handle?
- ▶ Ongoing monitoring and assessment by the local program manager: Regular dialogue between program staff, volunteers, and arts groups will ensure that all parties continue working toward a common goal and are getting what they want out of the project. Conduct separate meetings with each volunteer and arts group when a project has ended. The meeting with the arts group is also an opportunity to update their assessment and determine any additional help they may wish from the volunteer program. The importance of evaluation and reporting cannot be overemphasized. It is necessary for improving the program and extremely helpful for future recruitment and funding.
- ▶ Social and recognition programs:
  - Regular volunteer networking/recruitment events.
  - Workshops and arts opportunities provided by arts clients.
  - Annual recognition award event to celebrate the volunteers.
  - Featured volunteer on website each month.

## Resources

For more information about the BVA program, visit our [website](#) or e-mail [privatesector@artsusa.org](mailto:privatesector@artsusa.org).



*Building Relationships with Business: Volunteering for the Arts*  
(The pARTnership Movement Series) on-demand webinar

*Strategies on how to build and fund successful volunteer programs on-demand webinar*

*Working with Volunteers Tool-kit*

*Community—It's Our Business, Deloitte, 2012*

*Readiness Roadmap: Helping Nonprofits Navigate Skills-Based Volunteering*

*The Taproot Foundation:* Promotes skills-based consulting

*HandsOn Network:* Source for skills-based volunteering

*Volunteer Lawyers for the Arts*

*State Bar Association Website:* Locate a Bar Association in your region for legal skills-based services

*Support Center Partnership in Philanthropy:* concerned with developing excellence in nonprofit management

*Board Source:* the go-to resource for funders, partners, and nonprofit leaders who want to magnify their impact within their community through exceptional governance practices.

*VolunteerMatch:* a forum to list volunteer opportunities and learn more about managing volunteer programs

*Catchafire:* A skills-based volunteer organization

