

# Skills-Based Volunteerism: A New Generation of Service

Corporation for  
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COMMUNITY  
SERVICE** 



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NETWORK



*We now know that corporate social responsibility is not just the right thing to do; it's the smart thing to do. We have come to understand that the only way our companies can grow and prosper in this age of accountability is by achieving results and solving problems that benefit both our businesses and our communities.*

– Patrick Corvington  
CEO, Corporation for National and Community Service

## Introduction

The nonprofit community finds itself increasingly called upon to address a wide range of challenges – from unemployment, to failing schools, to natural disasters. While there is an increasing reliance on the nonprofit sector to solve social problems and respond effectively to crises, the sustainability of nonprofits themselves is often neglected. Without the resources to strengthen and maintain the infrastructure and services of nonprofit organizations, this sector will be unable to respond effectively to growing demands.

Nonprofits are now looking to successful human resource practices from the corporate sector – defining clear roles and recruiting top talent to achieve those goals – as models for engaging volunteers in meeting their own organizational challenges. The two largest generational groups in particular – Boomers and Millennials – want to make a difference, give back, and get connected to organizations that can help them translate their talents into solutions to our most complex social problems. By mobilizing skilled volunteers – individuals and employee volunteers – and matching them with projects that target the critical needs of the organizations, nonprofits are creating greater impact while ensuring sustainability into the future.

Similarly the corporate sector is taking advantage of the opportunity to develop their employees' leadership skills by engaging them in work with nonprofits that increases their creativity and problem-solving abilities. Engaging skilled employees in volunteering helps companies build their reputation as socially responsible businesses – which in turn, allow them to better attract and retain the best employees.

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As we venture to meet the tests of this new century, all who have a stake in the health and prosperity of our local, national and international communities are coming together to invest in a new generation of service: skills-based volunteering.

Deloitte's 2005 Volunteer IMPACT Survey reported that more than 80 percent of working adults believe that volunteering enhances decision-making, problem solving, networking,

## Background

"Corporate social responsibility" (CSR) emerged in the 1970s through a movement that brought the corporate sector together with public interest in the environment. CSR programs added employee volunteerism to in-kind donations and charitable contributions as part of the portfolio of philanthropy practices. The legal community, in particular, led the way in contributing professional expertise to the nonprofit sector, and in 1983, the American Bar Association adopted a rule that all lawyers should "render public interest legal service." In 1993, the Law Firm Pro Bono Project challenged the legal community to contribute three to five percent of billable hours to pro bono legal services. As a result, the number of organizations offering legal services at no cost drastically increased from approximately 80 organized programs in 1980 to almost 800 in 2007. More recently, consulting firms have begun to join the legal sector in volunteering their professional expertise in their own business areas, such as accounting, marketing and strategic planning.

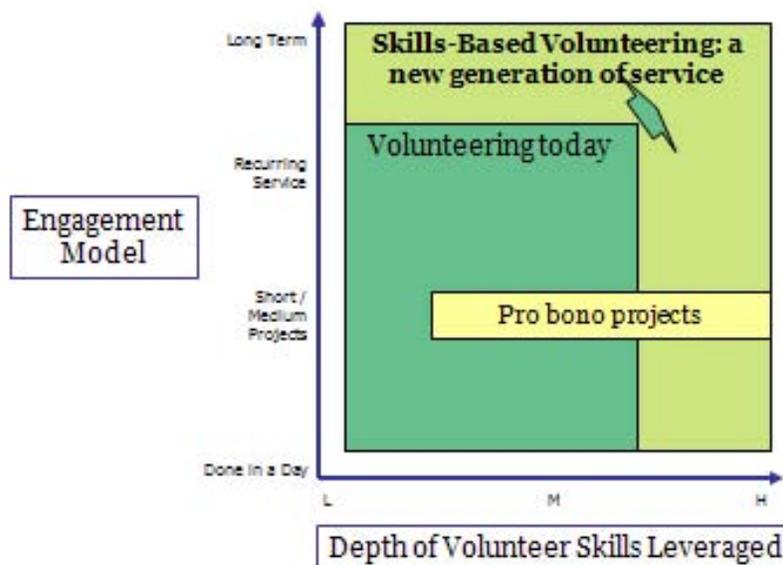
Today, the nonprofit sector is the fastest-growing sector of the U.S. economy, yet its growth is inhibited by a chronic need for investment in its own infrastructure and service capacity. Fortunately, there has been a simultaneous rise in the number of volunteers available to help fill those infrastructure gaps. Building on the legacy of President Kennedy's creation of the Peace Corps and President H.W. Bush's vision of volunteer workers as a "thousand points of light," President Obama's own "Call to Service" has inspired a new generation of volunteers who see social service as a meaningful way to give back to their

country. For this new generation – known as *Generation Next*, *Generation Y* or *Millennials* – volunteering is part of what it means to engage in the life of a community, whether locally, nationally or on the other side of the world. At the same time, the wave of newly retiring “Boomers” means that more skilled workers are now ready, willing and able to put their years of experience to work in service to their communities.

In the private sector, companies are now taking a broader approach to philanthropy that includes giving nonprofits access to their most valuable resource – their talent. And their motives are not altogether altruistic. Companies have found that engaging their employees in nonprofit work increases those employees’ creativity and problem-solving abilities, and is an effective means for building critical business and leadership skills. Employee volunteer programs provide an effective recruiting and retention strategy as well; nearly two-thirds of Gen Y employees say they would prefer to work for an organization that provides opportunities to volunteer their skills. In addition, as companies continuously look for ways to strengthen their image, they show their commitment to being good neighbors by putting their vital human resources to work in their communities.

### What is Skills-Based Volunteering (SBV)?

Skills-based volunteering (SBV) is an innovative approach that is rapidly gaining recognition as a powerful driver of both social impact and business value. Skills-based volunteerism utilizes the skills, experience, talents and education of volunteers and matches them with the needs of nonprofits. By leveraging all types of knowledge and expertise, SBV helps build and sustain nonprofits’ capacity to achieve their missions successfully. Individual skilled volunteers may offer their particular expertise to a nonprofit agency, while corporate SBV involves employee volunteers working on projects for a nonprofit organization through a structured program developed and managed by their employer.



## Skills-Based Volunteering vs. Pro Bono

### Pro Bono

Many people are already familiar with the term *pro bono*, and understand that it has to do with “doing work for free.” In the context of skills-based volunteering, however, pro bono is a subset of SBV.

**Pro bono projects provide nonprofits with expert consulting services that they otherwise cannot afford.**

In the pro bono model, volunteers contribute their expertise directly to a nonprofit’s internal operations, strengthening the infrastructure and capacity of the organization. This type of project utilizes core competencies that all businesses need – whether in the private or nonprofit sector – to be efficient and effective, including:

Strategic and Business Planning	Human Resources and Organizational Development
Marketing and Communications	Finance and Accounting
Information Technology	Logistics
Product Development	Fundraising and Development
Project and Program Management	Multi-media Strategy

Pro bono services are an important type of SBV that provides a nonprofit with skills and expertise critical to maintaining a productive organization.

### Pro bono Project: Capital One and St. Joseph’s Villa

St. Joseph’s Villa (SJV) is a residential facility and school for at-risk children in Richmond, Virginia. The mission of St. Joseph’s Villa is to provide children with special needs and their families the opportunity to succeed through innovative and effective programs, and SJV works with more than 600 children and families each day. The organization was struggling to reach its fundraising goals, and needed help to increase both the number of donors to the organization and the average amount of each gift. The Capital One Brand Corps leveraged its extensive direct mail experience to help SJV’s development department create a more engaging and efficient direct mail program aimed at increasing the number of donors and improving the responses from donors. As a result, SJV succeeded in significantly raising visibility for the organization among potential donors. In the first year of this new program, revenue from SJV’s existing donors increased by 41 percent and overall response to SJV direct mail increased by 51 percent.

To read more on this and other case studies, go to: [probonoactiontank.org/case-studies](http://probonoactiontank.org/case-studies)

## Skills-Based Volunteering

The concept of skills-based volunteering is broader than that of pro bono, and goes beyond the idea of traditional consulting services.

**SBV is a strategic type of volunteerism that exponentially expands the impact of nonprofits by incorporating a whole range of skills that strengthen the operations and services of nonprofit organizations.**

SBV is about matching the right person with the right skills and knowledge, at the right time, to the right project in order to achieve greater impact. Volunteers can choose to use their personal or professional talents, work individually or in teams and take on long or short term projects. They can volunteer for local, national or international organizations, and assist with planned projects or respond to immediate critical needs, such as disaster response. For companies, skills-based volunteering offers a way to expand corporate philanthropy to include the highly valued commodity of workplace talent, which can reap considerable value – and do much good – for nonprofits and communities in need. For individuals, skills-based volunteering provides the opportunity to use their expertise to make a measurable impact on issues they care about. SBV focuses on the value of a volunteer’s time by ensuring that it is used to create real results.

### **SBV Project: Fannie Mae and the Serve Program** Community Need: Foreclosure Prevention.

The deep contraction in the economy and in the housing market has created devastating consequences for homeowners and communities throughout the country. Millions of responsible families who make their monthly payments and fulfill their obligations have seen their property values fall and are now unable to refinance to lower mortgage rates. Meanwhile, millions of workers have lost their jobs or had their hours cut and are now struggling to stay current on their mortgage payments. In 2008, Fannie Mae partnered with the Home Ownership Center (HOC), an Ohio-based nonprofit agency, to provide outreach to borrowers who were struggling to stay in their homes. The HOC had an idea to host a phone-a-thon-style event to encourage borrowers to call in if they were struggling to keep their mortgage payments current. The HOC needed help in planning, organizing logistics, funding and staffing the event, so they turned to Fannie Mae for support.

Employees in Fannie Mae’s communications and technology departments donated their expertise as consultants to HOC, helping to solicit media coverage and assemble the proper computer and phone infrastructure to have a successful phone-a-thon. Fannie Mae was able to provide skilled employee volunteers who donated their expertise to create and implement the event. For example, several members of the Fannie Mae communications team donated their time to write the telephone script and consult with HOC on building media support. The Fannie Mae technology team provided consultation on software usage and the technology employee volunteers worked diligently with the local phone company in Ohio to ensure that the thousands of incoming calls would be routed properly. Fannie Mae was also able to provide volunteers who were multilingual, allowing HOC to receive information from borrowers who speak English as a second language.

To support the overall foreclosure prevention effort, the Fannie Mae SERVE team takes a leadership role in identifying opportunities to volunteer and organizing volunteers.

To read more about MS&L and Samaritan House, go to: [www.pointsoflight.org/our-work/research/sbv](http://www.pointsoflight.org/our-work/research/sbv)

## Benefits of Skills-Based Volunteering

### Benefits for Nonprofits

While it is important for nonprofits to inspire others to volunteer with their organizations and to solve the most challenging problems of today, we know that just “showing up” is not enough. Nonprofits cannot only persuade people to care about their missions; they must also engage volunteers in meaningful, highly productive ways. Today, the focus of volunteer service is on results – matching available expertise and talents to nonprofit business goals. Targeted recruitment of skilled volunteers can help nonprofits do more with less by focusing volunteer work on a wide variety of projects at no cost, including: developing vision and strategy, creating marketing plans and materials, recommending new programs, and training staff. Volunteers today bring with them a range of personal and professional experience: a boomer might work with low-income families on financial education, while a millennial trains nonprofit staff on using social networking technology to raise brand awareness. In addition, SBV serves as a point of entry into the local business community, offering nonprofits the opportunity to make connections with companies and expand their sources of support.

Large nonprofit organizations such as the [American Red Cross](#) have had great success establishing employee volunteer partnerships for their local chapters leveraging executive management skills or subject matter expertise. For example, a nonprofit CFO can be matched with an individual or private sector volunteer with equivalent or complementary knowledge, skills or expertise. A nonprofit may not be able to “hire” a Fortune 500 executive, but it may find a willing pool of Fortune 500 executive volunteers willing to plug into strategic roles or as partner volunteers.

### Getting Ready

Securing a strong commitment from the nonprofit’s executives to the SBV approach is key to realizing the most value from volunteers’ work. However, it is just the first step; it takes time and effort to turn good intentions into greater impact. While some nonprofits are able to reallocate resources to establish internal structural support for bringing on skills-based volunteers, others may benefit from engaging the services of an intermediary expert or request help from a volunteer mobilization organization to carry out a *readiness assessment*. (See *Ensuring SBV Success* on p. 8) As part of this assessment, the nonprofit creates a strategy plan for implementing SBV in the organization and defining the specific projects and specialized skills needed.

#### Nonprofit Readiness Toolkit for Pro Bono Volunteering

The Corporation for National and Community Service’s *Nonprofit Readiness Toolkit* outlines a process for successfully incorporating SBV to enhance an organization’s work.  
[nationalserviceresources.org/news/](http://nationalserviceresources.org/news/)

## Benefits for Companies

Just as nonprofits are trying to respond to growing demands, the corporate sector is being pressured to achieve measurable results through its community giving strategies. SBV increases the value of companies' support to community partners by increasing the magnitude of impact those partners have – a kind of multiplier effect. Through skills-based volunteering, companies can offer the specific knowledge and unique business experience of their professional workforce, which is often what nonprofits need most. Corporations can strategically focus their social investment by making available their most competitive asset – their talent. This factor is especially important as companies look for ways to demonstrate an ongoing commitment to the community and to diversify their service project portfolios. SBV is a win-win value proposition that creates a foundation on which companies and nonprofits can build ongoing, mutually beneficial relationships.

SBV programs also help companies to recruit and retain employees, as job seekers are increasingly interested in a company's community engagement, particularly young people entering the workforce. Research shows that SBV improves recruitment and retention, especially among Millennials, and that it enhances employee morale, loyalty and productivity. Working for nonprofits with new teams, under added constraints and with limited resources, helps give employees a new perspective and stimulates their creativity. Many progressive companies have established formal or informal human resources policies to support skills-based and employee volunteering by establishing paid time off or other work related incentives. Some companies bring in the family of their employees and retirees on volunteering opportunities as well. For global corporations, SVB becomes a reward program for their best employees; individuals apply to participate in international projects, and after a selection process based on skills and career, the employee receives training as a leader on an overseas volunteer mission.

### Tips for Companies

There are a number of ways companies can ensure the greatest return on their investment in SBV. Some tips for success are:

**Be** open to supporting more than one cause in order to broaden your organization's scope of impact in the community.

**Keep** SBV projects going all year round. Skills-based volunteerism is part of a strategic approach to community involvement, not a once-a-year program.

**Show** the value of the volunteers' work by putting a dollar value on it.

Good corporate citizenship is increasingly recognized as a key component of successful businesses and skills-based and pro bono volunteering is a particularly effective way to improve a company's reputation as a socially responsible organization. Since it is often easier to measure the impact of an SBV project than of a hands-on service project, the return on the company's investment is much more visible. In addition, SBV initiatives give companies the opportunity to align their volunteering programs with their own areas of interest – such as a financial services company offering its employees' skills to financial literacy education.

## Getting Ready

Integrating a skills-based volunteering program into a company's community giving strategy requires a commitment to high-quality implementation from the outset. A company should approach a nonprofit as it would any other business client, setting an expectation with all parties that it will measure the work of each project – just as it would if the nonprofit had paid for it. This means that the project will be completed and delivered in a timely manner; both the nonprofit and the volunteer's expectations will be met or exceeded, and the nonprofit will be able to identify an impact on its goals as a result of the project.

Companies may begin implementing an SBV program by offering employees the opportunity to work on a few projects with a nonprofit with which they have an established relationship. Building on the success of those small initiatives, the employer can then identify additional projects or deploy volunteers into other markets. Intermediary organizations can assist in this process as well, connecting companies with nonprofits looking for skilled volunteers, and ensuring that the nonprofits are well prepared to take on skilled volunteers. (See *Ensuring SBV Success* on p. 8)

## Benefits for Volunteers

Skills-based volunteering opens the door to individuals seeking to use their personal and professional skills and talents for the benefit of their communities. For those participating in their company's SBV program, volunteering also provides a refreshing, creative change from daily work that enhances the overall work experience. Because SBV enhances organizational, leadership, communication and decision-making skills, it can often lead to career development within a company. For younger people or those transitioning to a different field of work, SBV offers the chance to network, build and develop new talents, and establish relationships with potential nonprofit employers. Volunteering also fills gaps between jobs with expanded, tangible work experience and may lead to opportunities in new fields, including the nonprofit sector.

### Tips for Volunteers

**Assess** the knowledge, skills and experience you can offer a nonprofit.

**Choose** an organization whose work is important to you, and identify ways you can support its mission.

**Establish** goals and expectations for each project.

## Do-It-Yourself Projects

Individual volunteers can also help solve problems in their communities by taking the lead on “self-organizing” projects. By identifying a need and bringing people together to meet that need – often supported by members of social, faith-based or other organizations – individual volunteer leaders can create lasting social change. In these cases, the volunteer leader works with the other volunteers to carry out all stages of the project: identifying the roles and responsibilities of each team member, defining the scope of the work, and creating project schedules, deadlines and protocols. Individual leaders take on the roles of providing management and oversight of the project, as well as evaluation and recognition of the volunteers' work. Working together in this way, volunteers can develop leadership and teamwork skills while making real progress on social issues that are important to them.



Highly skilled individuals can take the initiative to provide nonprofits with pro bono consulting services, which may have a particularly strong impact on the effectiveness of those organizations. This type of SBV pays large dividends for the organization, while offering a meaningful and often life-changing experience of service for the volunteer. However, in order to ensure the best results, it is important for the pro bono expert first to verify the nonprofit organization's readiness to successfully retain and profit from the volunteer service. (See *Ensuring SBV Success* on p. 8)

## Benefits for Funders

Funders who seek to promote quality of life in their target communities do well by their missions when they provide support to SBV initiatives. By replacing high cost contract services with skilled volunteer services, nonprofits can stretch funders' grant dollars and demonstrate good stewardship of limited resources. In addition, through support of SBV intermediary organizations and SBV projects, funders make it possible for nonprofits to access pro bono products and expertise, and to establish relationships with corporate foundations that may result in future funding. Skills-based and pro bono initiatives are recognized as some of the best solutions to the problem of limited nonprofit sector capacity. Now is the time for funders to invest the work of all of the participants engaged in this innovative approach.

## Benefits for Communities

The value of any kind of social service is the degree to which it affects real change in disadvantaged communities. Skills-based volunteers help nonprofits expand and improve their services, making it possible for them to reach farther and do more. Through this increased civic engagement, communities find they have fewer and less critical social problems and better overall quality of life. SBV builds relationships among communities, nonprofits and businesses that, in turn, create stronger local, regional and national economies. In addition, the result of recent initiatives utilizing the skills of local businesses in rural areas has proven that SBV is a key solution to supporting nonprofits working on economic recovery in hard-hit areas.



## Ensuring SBV Success

The impact of a skills-based program on the work of a nonprofit depends closely on effective implementation. Both nonprofits and companies can take steps to ensure the high quality of pro bono volunteer programs.

### Intermediary Organizations

Intermediary organizations connect individuals or companies seeking to put their employee volunteers' expertise to work for their communities with nonprofits that can benefit from the skills and talents of these vital human resources. Intermediaries, who are often nonprofits themselves, offer a number of services to ensure that organizations are ready to engage skilled volunteers. They work with nonprofits to identify their needs and define projects, and partner with companies to recruit skilled volunteers and match them to the right projects. Intermediary experts can also help manage projects and evaluate the results. National nonprofits may also serve as intermediaries, connecting their affiliates with private sector companies in multiple locations.

### Volunteer Centers

Volunteer centers across the country can help facilitate SBV projects by working with nonprofit organizations on a *readiness assessment* – often assisted by a *SBV Facilitator* or an *AmeriCorps Vista Volunteer* acting as a consultant – who identifies the elements the organizations need to put in place to effectively prepare for and implement SBV. The centers' staff can also provide an *SBV Volunteer Leader* to help define projects and manage volunteers, as well as to ensure the completion, evaluation and recognition of the results of each project.

Funders may refer nonprofits to intermediary organizations or volunteer centers for consultation, assessment or services, and take advantage of the insights and knowledge that intermediary organizations can provide regarding community needs and priorities.

### Intermediary Organizations and Volunteer Centers

**Common Impact** [commonimpact.org](http://commonimpact.org)

**Compass DC** [compassdc.org](http://compassdc.org)

**Executives in Action**  
[executivesinaction.org](http://executivesinaction.org)

**Executive Service Corps**  
[escus.org](http://escus.org)

**HandsOn Network**  
[handsonnetwork.org](http://handsonnetwork.org) and 1-800-  
[volunteer.org](http://volunteer.org)

**Jericho Road Project**  
[jerichoroadproject.org](http://jerichoroadproject.org)

**Pro Bono Partnership**  
[probonopartner.org](http://probonopartner.org)

**Taproot Foundation**  
[taprootfoundation.org](http://taprootfoundation.org)

**United Way**  
[unitedway.org](http://unitedway.org)

## Organizations supporting Skills-Based and Pro bono Volunteering

### [commonimpact.org](http://commonimpact.org)

Common Impact is a nonprofit organization that connects skilled professionals from global companies to high-potential local nonprofits.

### [compassdc.org](http://compassdc.org)

Through pro bono strategic consulting, Compass DC strengthens the capacity, effectiveness and sustainability of Greater Washington DC nonprofits.

### [probonoactiontank.org](http://probonoactiontank.org)

Pro Bono Action Tank is an organization created by the Taproot Foundation that works to increase access to high-quality pro bono services for public benefit organizations working to address society's social, environmental and economic issues.

### [escus.org](http://escus.org)

Through a nationwide network of nonprofit consulting organizations, Executive Service Corps provides high quality, affordable consulting services and other technical assistance to nonprofits, schools and government agencies.

### [executivesinaction.org](http://executivesinaction.org)

Executives in Action (EIA) engages transitioning, senior executives in short-term, high-yield consulting projects with local nonprofit organizations, primarily in Texas.

### [handsonnetwork.org](http://handsonnetwork.org)

HandsOn Network/Points of Light Institute inspires, equips and mobilizes people to take action that changes the world through a network of more than 250 HandsOn Action Centers.

### [idealist.org](http://idealist.org)

Idealist.org is the world's largest nonprofit networking site, with more than one million registered users and thousands of job openings, volunteer opportunities, internships, and events posted by more than 94,000 public service organizations in 190 countries.

### [jerichoroadproject.org](http://jerichoroadproject.org)

The JRP bridges communities by matching the professional talents of volunteers with the needs of community-based nonprofit organizations to promote community development strengthen social services and enrich the lives of volunteers.

### [lexmundiprobono.org](http://lexmundiprobono.org)

The Lex Mundi Pro Bono Foundation calls upon Lex Mundi's unique global network of 160 top-tier commercial law firms to provide legal assistance to select "social entrepreneurs" on a pro bono basis.

### [nationalservice.gov](http://nationalservice.gov)

The Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS), a government agency, is the nation's largest grant maker supporting service and volunteering.

*[probonoinstitute.org](http://probonoinstitute.org)*

The Pro Bono Institute is a small nonprofit organization that provides research, consultative services, analysis and assessment, publications, and training to a broad range of legal audiences.

*[probonopartnership.org](http://probonopartnership.org)*

Pro Bono Partnership provides nonprofit organizations in Connecticut, New Jersey and New York with free, expert business legal advice they cannot otherwise afford, enhancing their capacity to improve local communities and provide essential programs for the poor and disadvantaged.

*[smartvolunteer.org](http://smartvolunteer.org)*

SmartVolunteer's mission is to connect skilled professionals with volunteer opportunities that utilize their professional expertise. SmartVolunteer matches nonprofits and charities with the individuals necessary to fill the critical needs of their organization.

*[taprootfoundation.org](http://taprootfoundation.org)*

Taproot Foundation is a nonprofit organization that works to leverage top talent in support of communities' greatest needs.

*[volunteermatch.org](http://volunteermatch.org)*

VolunteerMatch strengthens communities by making it easier for good people and good causes to connect. The organization offers a variety of online services to support a community of nonprofit, volunteer and business leaders committed to civic engagement.



## Conclusion

Using what has been learned from the fields of volunteer and human resources management, skills-based volunteering utilizes the wide range of education, skills and experience of individuals to solve critical social problems, while providing a ground-breaking way to develop volunteers' own talents and abilities. Through skills-based volunteering programs in particular – including pro bono initiatives – companies can put the expertise of their employee volunteers to work in nonprofit organizations, thereby strengthening the effectiveness of nonprofits' services and creating tangible, powerful community change. SBV helps nonprofit organizations better achieve their missions, while offering individuals a meaningful experience and returning value to companies seeking innovative strategies of community engagement. Now is the time to bring together all stakeholders on a mutually beneficial venture that drives positive social change, leading to results that work for all of us – safer, stronger and healthier communities.

**This document has been developed** in collaboration with a consortium of national nonprofit organizations\* focusing on capacity building for volunteering and nonprofits convened by the Corporation for National and Community Service and co-led by Points of Light Institute / HandsOn Network. We particularly thank: American Red Cross, Common Impact, Jericho Road Project, and Taproot Foundation for their active participation. We would also like to thank the HandsOn Network Corporate Service Council members for helping to define the SBV value proposition for businesses, especially: Accenture, Cbeyond, Deloitte Global Office and The Hitachi Foundation.

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