



The Chapter One guide to **Workplace Volunteering**



IT ALL STARTS WITH **LITERACY**

The evidence is conclusive.

Employee or workplace volunteering, supported by businesses, is no longer a 'nice-to-have' but a **MUST DO**



The moral imperative is compelling - volunteering supports and lifts up those in our society facing disadvantage



The economic case is overwhelming - billions generated in productivity gains from more engaged, healthier, happier staff

Yet, introducing or overseeing an employee volunteering opportunity is not without its challenges. We're Chapter One, a UK literacy charity that transforms children's futures with one-to-one online reading support at the time they need it the most. We partner with businesses to empower them and their employees to support children facing disadvantage in some of the coldest social-mobility spots in the country. **This guide is to help you navigate the latest thinking and apply it to developing your employee volunteering programme. It covers:**

- **the latest research on employee volunteering**, including Chapter One's own expert experience and analysis
- **Chapter One's recommendations** - based on a survey of our corporate partners and case studies - on setting yourself up for success

THE BIG PICTURE

WORKPLACE VOLUNTEERING IN 2026

Globally, the picture is one of exciting growth. Corporate volunteering opportunities offered to employees of large corporations have soared over the last few years, with record rates of employee participation, hours and skills given and unique volunteers.

What's driving this growth?

Corporate volunteering has a renewed purpose in a hybrid work environment as a way to deepen employee connection, strengthen company culture and create a sense of community.

This dovetails with a demonstrable shift in how we perceive our work life. According to 2022 research from McKinsey, 70% of employees said their personal sense of purpose is defined by their work. A Monster survey about Gen Z found that 74% rank purpose ahead of pay, higher than any other generation.

96% of large corporate firms list employee engagement as a top reason to invest in volunteering

49% of businesses said they want volunteering to build empathy and issues awareness

50% of companies are increasing their investments in volunteering programmes

Source:
The State of Corporate Purpose 2026, Benevity



INVESTING IN OUR WORKFORCE, ECONOMY AND SOCIETY

The growth in corporate volunteering and the influx of new volunteers represents a significant opportunity to drive lasting impact. Employee volunteering offers a **triple dividend** as identified by Pro Bono Economics in a May 2024 report - 'How workplace volunteering can make us happier, healthier and more productive'.

1. It can help **employee wellbeing**;
2. It can support **higher productivity** for employers;
3. It can help charities **tackle some of the biggest challenges facing society**.

The business case for employee volunteering

Escalating costs created by the UK's unhealthy workforce has led to a renewed focus on how to tackle absenteeism and presenteeism, improve worker wellbeing, and recover productivity. Pro Bono Economics's research has estimated that volunteering could save 1.4 to 2.5 million sick days, the equivalent to a 1% reduction in UK total sick days. Involvement in workplace volunteering specifically has been shown to lead to better self-reported health, lower risk of depression, and higher levels of job engagement and satisfaction. In addition, links have also been made between workplace volunteering and reductions in sickness absence. This in turn boosts productivity through better health and improved skills.

Even after deducting the costs of time and administration, the benefits of employee volunteering could amount to net productivity gains of between £1.6 billion and £2.8 billion. Expanding workplace volunteering opportunities to cover all UK employees could generate £1.2-£3.6 billion in wellbeing benefits per year to the individuals.

WHILE THE EVIDENCE FOR THE EFFICACY OF EMPLOYEE WELLBEING INITIATIVES IS OVERALL WEAK, THERE IS ONE NOTABLE EXCEPTION: **WORKPLACE VOLUNTEERING SHOWS COMPELLING AND CONSISTENT EVIDENCE OF ITS POSITIVE IMPACT ON EMPLOYEES' WELLBEING.**

Further reading:

[UK Employee Volunteering 2022-23, Works4U](#)

[Pro Bono Economics 'Triple Dividend', May 2024](#)

[NCVO 'Time Well Spent', 2019](#)

[WJ Fleming, 'Employee wellbeing outcomes from individual-level mental health interventions', 2024](#)



At Chapter One we survey our corporate volunteers at the end of the school year, most of them having read with their young pupil since the autumn term. In our latest survey **79% said that online reading with Chapter One resulted in a greater sense of personal fulfilment and achievement.**

'I WASN'T ASKED'

HOW DO EMPLOYEES VIEW VOLUNTEERING AT WORK?

While volunteering has become business critical - it appears that employers are not keeping up with demand. Repeated analysis of the main reasons why people generally do not volunteer shows that **employees feel they have not been asked to participate and that they do not have enough time.**

- Over a third (38%) of employees say that **lack of guidance from their employer** is an obstacle to them volunteering (*Pro Bono Economics, 2024*)
- 17-23 million employees **do not yet have access to volunteering opportunities** (*NCVO 'Time Well Spent', 2019*)

The social enterprise **Works4U** has conducted a survey that focused on the employee experience. When asked why they were not volunteering in the workplace, 40% of respondents said that **no one had asked them.**

Employer lip service and 'busy' culture

A quarter (24.7%) of the same survey respondents **did not know how much time their employer allowed for volunteering.**

Plus, when those who had not participated in any volunteering were asked the reasons why, 28% of respondents said **their employer allowed it but did not promote it** and 60% of those that did not participate said they are **too busy at work.**

It also found that 94% thought **employers should do more to promote volunteering opportunities.**



OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

WHAT SHOULD EMPLOYERS FOCUS ON TO IMPROVE THEIR WORKPLACE VOLUNTEERING IN 2026?

Currently, there is a disconnect.

Employees report they don't know how much time their employer allows them for volunteering while employers say they can struggle to get the word out and recruit sign-ups. So what steps should companies take to set themselves up for success in developing workplace volunteering that benefits staff, business and society?

Drawing on this recent research and Chapter One's experience of working with our corporate partners to deliver an impactful corporate volunteering programme, we believe the following **FOUR STEPS** are key to enabling workplace volunteering to flourish.

STEP ONE: CULTURE FIRST

INVEST TIME IN GETTING IT RIGHT

Approach introducing employee volunteering as you would any other new business initiative - **take time to get it right** and don't treat it as a tick-box exercise. A **healthy volunteering culture** in an organisation will:

- Encourage volunteers **from all areas and levels of the business** to volunteer and to **share their stories** to inspire others to get involved
- **Recognise that not one size fits all**; different people enjoy different things and ways or models of contributing. For example:
 - Consider offering **online/remote volunteering** which can be more accessible and flexible for some staff
 - Look for opportunities that have **geographical relevance to your staff**, for example where they work, live or the company has projects
 - **Engage people with events and small actions they can take** - initiatives or a good deed that is not associated with a specific charity such as helping an elderly neighbour in need or a local park clean-up
 - **Skills-based volunteering** allows employees to offer their expertise to over-stretched and under-resourced charity partners
 - Nurture interest in giving back through **team-based and ongoing opportunities**, for example Chapter One's [Online Reading Volunteers Programme](#) is based on teams of employees being matched to read with the same children over a whole school year



21% of Chapter One's corporate survey respondents said they offer their employees **one paid volunteering day a year**. Another 21% said they encouraged a **culture of volunteerism** with no set allowance of days, while 18% offered **two paid volunteer days**.

We also asked **about rates of employees taking up the paid volunteering allowance**. 43% of respondents said 10-29% while 20% said less than 10% and another 20% said 30-49%.

Our findings reflected the global growth in virtual volunteering opportunities. 40% said 10-29% of their volunteering opportunities were virtual, and 29% said 30-59% were virtual. However, only 3% said that virtual volunteering was 60-90% of their offering, showing that a mixture of offline and online is still being offered.

CASE STUDY: HOW SODEXO ENGAGED EMPLOYEES ACROSS THE BUSINESS



A great example of engaging different teams and employees in a volunteering opportunity is a recent story competition we supported alongside our Platinum Partner the **Sodexo Stop Hunger Foundation**.

Since 2021 the Sodexo Stop Hunger Foundation has supported Sodexo's employees to provide children with one-to-one online reading support to Chapter One children. Over the 2025-26 school year, they supported over

100 children with a total of 654 hours of reading across 15 schools. An employee-led independent registered charity, the Foundation tackles food insecurity and its root causes.

In previous years, they invited Sodexo UK & Ireland employees to use their three days of paid volunteer days to craft a children's story for the Chapter One reading platform and Global Free Library on the theme 'bringing people together through food'. Employees were encouraged to co-author their entries with their children or other young people in their immediate circle. Entrants were also encouraged to nominate their young person to be a member of the jury. The winning book, *Cooking Pot Woods*, was announced and then read aloud by Jean Renton, CFO of Sodexo UK & Ireland, at an event at Sodexo's UK head offices.

The reading was also attended by children from two Chapter One schools: Galleywall Primary (London) - and (virtually) by children from Hill Top Primary in Doncaster (where children also read weekly with Sodexo online reading volunteers).

"The engagement we've seen from the business has been great... the whole experience working with Chapter One on this competition has left everyone feeling like a winner!" - **Lisa Kilby**, co-chair of the Sodexo Parents & Carers Network



STEP 2: FOCUS ON IMPACT

DON'T JUST COUNT THE VOLUNTEERING HOURS

Successful employee volunteering programmes **have impact at their heart** and ensure the volunteering benefits the business, its employees and society.

- **Agree impact measures with your charity partner**, help them to develop their evaluation methodology and to capture case studies
- **Consider multi-year partnerships with charities** for greater impact and wider employee involvement. This also allows charities to be more strategic and sustainable
- **Use skills-based or longer-term volunteer projects** - which some volunteers may find more rewarding - to deepen impact even further
- **Harness virtual volunteering opportunities** to enable your workforce to give back in areas of need where your company may not have a presence

51% of Chapter One survey respondents said they **use impact data from their charity partners** and a similar percentage **publish an annual impact report** which includes impact derived from employee volunteering.

Use employee volunteering to support your corporate social responsibility/ESG/social value strategy and themes such as UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the UK's TOMs framework. It's a fantastic way to engage your workforce in your social value strategy and demonstrate your CSR/ESG credentials to your clients, partners, investors and supply chain.



The Chapter One Online Reading Volunteers Programme links straight back to SDG4 - Quality Education - and has a measurable impact on the children taking part in regions of deprivation. Quality Education also underpins many of the other SDGs including No Poverty, Decent Work and Economic Growth and Reduced Inequalities. Chapter One provides real-time reporting to our corporate partners on volunteering hours and an end-of-year report on impact,

detailing the reading progress of the children supported by their employees.

We've also partnered with **Impact Advantage** to provide our partners with a bespoke impact valuation model that translates their volunteering into a clear financial value - including their organisation's Social Return on Investment (SROI). **Read more here.**

When asked to rank which factors employee volunteering had the greatest impact on, 32% of Chapter One survey respondents put employee engagement with their company's CSR/social value/ESG strategy as their top choice, with community relations coming in second at 26%.

Involve your clients, supply chain and partners in volunteering initiatives to strengthen relationships and impact.

CASE STUDY: HOW WE SUPPORTED COMMUNITY-LEVEL CHANGE IN CUMBRIA

In January 2023 Chapter One launched a partnership with the **Programme and Project Partners (PPP) at Sellafield Ltd** which brought our Online Reading Volunteers Programme to schools in West Cumbria.

Social value targets are embedded within the PPP procurement process and are a key driver for delivering social impact in the region which has some of the most socially deprived areas in the country. As part of this commitment, PPP wanted to support children and schools within the area to improve academic attainment. However, with many of the Sellafield supply chain companies located

outside West Cumbria, getting volunteers into schools was a challenge. This is where Chapter One's remote volunteer reading platform came into its own - enabling those companies with staff outside the region to tackle the literacy issue locally.

The PPP at Sellafield Ltd social impact team supported the Chapter One team in bringing together interested companies, schools and corporate volunteers, helping to sign up 11 sponsor companies and six participating schools. The companies provided 99 online reading volunteers.



Over the 2025-26 school year the programme expanded further across West Cumbria with 340 volunteers reading online with 355 children. Collectively, they read for more than 2,768 hours.

STEP 3: TALK ABOUT THE BUSINESS CASE

WORKPLACE VOLUNTEERING MAKES GOOD BUSINESS SENSE

Involve your human resources team in the development and management of your volunteering. Have a clear **volunteering policy** on how much volunteering leave is offered and ensure that this is **supported at all levels of management. Ensure you have senior managers both volunteering and sharing their experiences.**

There is a wealth of research to demonstrate how volunteering can support and improve **talent acquisition and retention, learning and development, team building** and **productivity.**



“ CHAPTER ONE FITS SO WELL WITHIN MY WORKING LIFE... JUST HALF AN HOUR A WEEK AND REALLY THAT HALF AN HOUR JUST TAKES 31 MINUTES BECAUSE I CAN DO IT AT MY DESK.

Roger Thompson, CFO, Janus Henderson Investors

When asked what their most effective channels were for encouraging employees to sign up to workplace volunteering initiatives, 32.4% of Chapter One survey respondents put **advocacy and take-up by senior leaders** as their top choice. This was followed by **communications**, specifically use of the company intranet (26.%) and email (21%).

In our latest volunteer survey 57% said that reading with Chapter One had improved their **empathy skills** and 57% said it improved their sense of purpose.

Also involve your communications team to help get the word out - companies who invest in actively promoting employee volunteering see the most benefits.



CASE STUDY: HOW OUR PARTNERS USE VIDEO TO COMMUNICATE WITH THEIR EMPLOYEES

Chapter One partners **Thakeham** and **Compare the Market** have both created films about their partnership with us in East Sussex and Peterborough schools respectively. The films encourage their employees to sign up as Chapter One online reading volunteers as well as showcasing our partnership externally and the impact of their support for children's literacy in areas of the country facing disadvantage. Watch the films [here](#).

STEP 4: GET SUPPORT

ENGAGE WITH CHARITY PARTNERS, COMMUNITY ORGANISATIONS OR INTERMEDIARIES

A charity partner will ensure your volunteers maximise their time and impact on your social value and business strategic goals and have a positive and rewarding experience.

- Look for a charity partner that **provides training and ongoing volunteer support**.
- **Be prepared to support your charity partners with funding** so that their model is sustainable and high-quality. For example, at Chapter One we oversee safeguarding, quality volunteer training and support, support and liaison with schools - and provide our partners with robust reports and impact data.
- **Charities and community organisations understand local needs** and have established relationships with local communities and stakeholders. They also have a lot of experience of managing volunteers.



“ THE CHAPTER ONE PROGRAMME SEAMLESSLY INTEGRATES WITH DATAGRAPHIC’S SOCIAL IMPACT STRATEGY... WE CAN SAFELY AND EASILY FACILITATE OUR STAFF TO GIVE SOMETHING BACK WHILST MAKING A MARKED DIFFERENCE WITHIN SCHOOLS. CHAPTER ONE IS A COST-EFFECTIVE WAY TO ADD REPORTABLE SOCIAL VALUE TO ANY BUSINESS.

Rhian Harris, Social Impact Manager, Datagraphic

METHODOLOGY

Benevity

Benevity State of Corporate Purpose 2026 research was conducted by Benevity between September 2025 and April 2026. The survey collected a total of 420 responses across two distinct cohorts: large corporate firms (108 respondents), Benevity clients primarily representing large enterprise firms and corporate foundations with annual revenues exceeding \$1 billion, and small to mid-size organizations (312 respondents), primarily representing mid-sized organizations with annual revenues under \$1 billion.

Chapter One

Over two weeks in May 2024 Chapter One surveyed 130 of our volunteer coordinators from our corporate partners. 32.4% of respondents represented companies with workforces of over 10,000, 10.8% between 5,000 and 9,999, 24.3% 1,000-4,999, 16.2% 500-999, 5.4% 250-499 and 10.4% had less than 250 employees. We also invited responses from other individuals in social value and corporate social responsibility roles by sharing the survey on LinkedIn. In total we received 37 responses.

We also used data from our 2025-26 survey of all volunteers who participated in our Online Reading Volunteers Programme.

Pro Bono Economics

PBE used data from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) and HM Treasury as well as evidence from the National Council of Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) and the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) and other research papers.

Works4U

Promoted across the UK in 2023, the survey was open to any employee of any employer, in any sector, where there were five or more employees. The survey was promoted predominantly through LinkedIn advertising and through Works4U's social media and wider networks. It was not promoted directly to Works4U's clients. There were a total of 546 responses to the survey which included online survey responses and some data collected from interviews/groups.

IT ALL STARTS WITH LITERACY



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Chapter One offers a flexible, time-efficient online volunteering opportunity for busy professionals who want to make a direct impact on the lives of children facing disadvantage.

Scan the QR code to watch a video with more information about partnering with Chapter One.



Chapter One is a registered UK Company (no. 11116416) and charity (no. 1179625)