



Cabinet Office
Green Paper on Giving

response from BT

10th March 2011

Introduction

We are pleased to respond to this Green Paper, as part of our growing partnership to support the communities in which we operate.

In these challenging times, there is a real opportunity for improving cross sector partnership between the corporate world, the Voluntary sector and the public sector. Rather than respond to the specific questions posed in the Green Paper, we have structured our input to reflect these three sectors.

Corporate

1. BT, along with other corporate organisations with large volunteering schemes, is moving from an emphasis on giving 'time' to giving 'skills'. This releases much needed skills to voluntary and community organisations, who may not be able to afford them, or even have access to them.
2. To position volunteering as 'leave' underestimates its power as an engagement tool leading to higher motivation and productivity, so at BT we do our volunteering as a part of our work, not as 'leave'.
3. It is important that volunteering remains voluntary. We believe that the opportunity to develop new skills in challenging environments, whilst doing something people are passionate about, is a compelling proposition which does not require compulsion.
4. The corporate world will continue to develop and support volunteering as a means of giving – but there are limited financial resources to support this in the current climate. It is important that potential public and voluntary sector partners are encouraged to align mutual objectives and develop less financially dependent ways of working.
5. It would help to explore incentivising corporate schemes through tax incentives linked to volunteering days in work time.
6. Employees seem to divide into four broad groups:-
 - a. existing volunteers – who may be motivated by the opportunity to bring their current volunteering skills and commitments within the corporate programme;
 - b. potential volunteers – who may have been meaning to volunteer but need a way in;
 - c. new volunteers – who hadn't thought about it before, but who may be engaged, perhaps through senior role models, innovative programmes or business relevance; and
 - d. unlikely volunteers – who do not currently see volunteering as an activity of choice.

7. Supporting these different volunteering journeys requires capable volunteer management and coherent infrastructure both in the corporate and voluntary sectors. It is often necessary to support the development from one – off to episodic to recurring volunteering, to build a substantial and sustainable volume of quality volunteering and a sustained skills transfer.
8. Further work could usefully be done on the three-way benefit case for the win – win – win of volunteering. Some of the relevant infrastructure bodies may have a role to play in helping to collate the range of data to build a convincing case, and establish trends and best practice, beyond individual case studies.
9. Further development in cross sector partnering would help the efficiency and effectiveness of cross sector collaboration.

Charities

10. In our experience it is important to invest in building reciprocal and mutually beneficial partnerships across the sectors. Mutual respect and value are key to sustainable joint activity, as are clear jointly agreed objectives.
11. The impact of central and local government cuts coming in multiple waves is creating tensions in charities' partnerships, and is impacting their ability to commit to joint schemes with corporates.
12. Some small charities struggle with defining what skills they need, and the deliverables they need to achieve. It may help for them to be grouped in relevant consortia supported by large charities or infrastructure bodies, which more often have these skills. We support this 'lead charity' approach, which may also help to build relationships which over time could lead to collaboration or mergers in some sectors.

Government

13. The Civil Service's own volunteering scheme needs to develop towards being comprehensive and excellent. BT and, no doubt, other Corporates would be happy to help in this journey, if this help is appropriately positioned and communicated.
14. Cross-party consensus on these issues would be hugely beneficial in terms of encouraging support for initiatives in this area.

We would be happy to discuss any of the issues raised in this short input, or to support further round table debate.

British Telecommunications plc
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