

Research Bulletin

Community Investment: The impacts of employee volunteering at Barclays Bank

Introduction

This research bulletin summarises the findings from an impact evaluation of employee volunteering undertaken by the Institute for Volunteering Research for Barclays Bank.

Barclays has seen continued growth in employee volunteering over the past three years, with participation more than doubling between 2001 and 2003. In 2003 12,270 UK staff members participated in volunteering, up from 10,051 in 2002 and 5,102 in 2001. The latest figures show 4,098 staff volunteered in the first six months of 2004, an increase of 26% on the same period in 2003.

The increase in employee volunteering at Barclays is considerably in excess of the more gradual growth in employee volunteering in the UK. The 2001 Home Office Citizenship Survey indicated that in the previous 12 months 18% of employees (excluding self employed people) worked for employers that supported schemes for volunteering, and 7% of employees had volunteered through these schemes. This suggests there has been a 4% increase in employees getting involved in volunteering with the support of their employees since 1997, when the National Survey of Volunteering found 3% of employees and former employees had volunteered as a result of their employer's encouragement.

Key findings

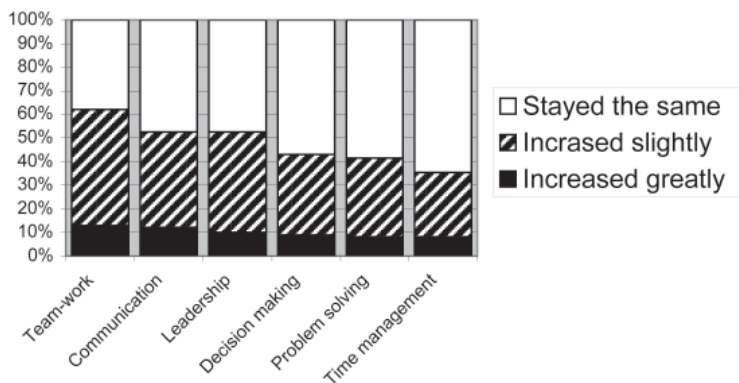
Engaging employees in the community

Barclays has been successful at engaging staff that have previously not been regular volunteers and has acted as a catalyst to encourage employees to get further involved in the community:

- One in five (21%) employee volunteers had never volunteered before and just under half (47%) were not regularly taking part in volunteering.
- One third (34%) of volunteers have been encouraged to undertake other community activities outside of work time, such as becoming school governors, taking part in sponsored activities or becoming trustees and treasurers of local charities.
- This desire to become involved in the community increased with the frequency of involvement: over half (52%) of those who had volunteered through Barclays more than four times had taken up other activities, compared with under a quarter (23%) of those who had volunteered only once.

Impacts on staff

Staff reported a range of impacts, from personal gains such as increased confidence and self esteem, to soft and hard work skills including team-work, communication, leadership



Graph 1: Skills developed by Barclays volunteers

and project management (see Graph 1). Volunteers also reported gaining a greater understanding of the needs and problems of their local communities and an increased sense of empathy with local people:

- Sixty-seven per cent of volunteers felt that their understanding of social issues had increased and 68% said that they were more aware of problems facing people in the community.
- Managers saw the greatest impacts on their staff in terms of increased communication and leadership skills: 61% reported that staff communication skills had improved; 56% felt that staff leadership skills had.

- Skills tended to increase with the frequency of volunteering: for example, over half (56%) of those who had volunteered four times or more reported that their decision-making skills had increased, compared with only 37% of those who had volunteered once or twice.

Impacts on Barclays

Employee volunteering has had a number of positive impacts on Barclays, including increasing employees' pride in the company, increasing staff job satisfaction, improving team working and raising Barclays profile in local communities. These can have knock on effects in terms of recruitment and retention.

“The social aspect of team building meant I just knew a lot more people, and that meant when you’ve got a business issue, I just knew who to go and speak to, for example.”
– Volunteer

“Although I get head hunted a lot... for me, [employee volunteering is] one of the main reasons I have stayed with Barclays.” – Volunteer

- Sixty-eight per cent of volunteers felt that their understanding of colleagues had increased as a result of employee volunteering, while 61% reported that their team-work skills had grown.
- Fifty-eight per cent of managers reported that their staff worked better together after volunteering. Nearly half (49%) of managers saw employee volunteering as ‘very effective as a team building exercise’, while a further 39% rated it as ‘quite effective’.
- However managers saw employee volunteering as less appropriate for delivering formal training. Only 9% rated employee volunteering as a very effective method of training and 36% of them judged it to be ‘not very effective’.
- Taking part in regular volunteering increases job satisfaction: the more times an employee has volunteered through Barclays the more likely it is that his or her job satisfaction has increased.
- More volunteers than non-volunteers would recommend Barclays as an employer (67% of volunteers compared with 58% of non-volunteers).
- Pride in Barclays increased with the number of times staff had volunteered: those who had volunteered four or more times were more likely to agree that they talked to family and friends about Barclays’

support for the community than those who had volunteered only once (78% compared with 64%).

“Helped me to feel more motivated about Barclays as an employer.” – *Volunteer*

Help for community organisations

The wider community benefits enormously from the skills and resources of Barclays and its employee volunteers.

- Eighty-four per cent of organisations were very satisfied with the experience of involving Barclays’ employee volunteers, a further 13% were quite satisfied.
- Ninety-four per cent of organisations want to develop their relationship with Barclays. The preferred form of help was more financial donations (46%) but a substantial number wanted more volunteers (38%).
- Organisations appreciated the personal relationships they could develop with the Community Teams: 58% were very satisfied and a further 19% quite satisfied with the communication with the Community Teams.

“A big impact was made due to the number of people involved and their enthusiasm. We achieved more than we hoped for. Staff enjoyed working alongside Barclays staff.” – *Representative of community organisation*

Issues

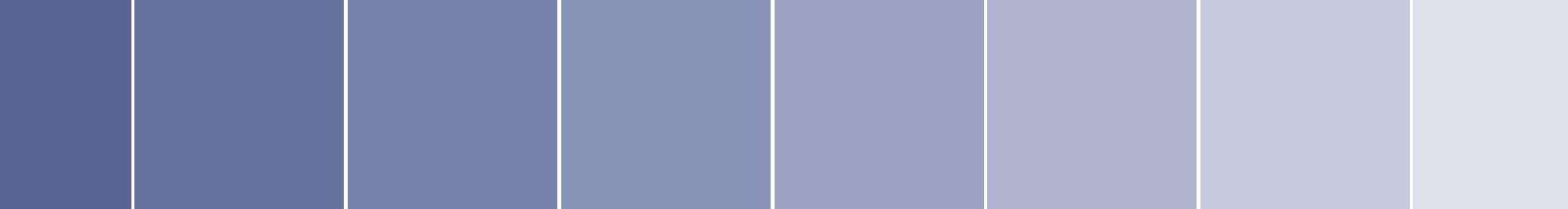
Employee volunteering at Barclays allows volunteers to experience many personal benefits and to make a significant contribution to the work of a wide range of organisations. The research shows that Barclays is well on its way to meeting its objective of bringing long lasting and tangible benefits to local communities. However the research revealed a number of issues that need to be addressed if the value of employee volunteering at Barclays is to be fully realised:

1. Barriers to participation

Given the potential beneficial impacts on morale, recruitment and retention deriving from staff participation in employee volunteering, it is important that as many staff as possible have access to the schemes. Evidence suggests, however, that not all staff have the same opportunities to get involved in employee volunteering. The major barriers to greater involvement are: time; pressures of work; and a lack of information about the schemes. These affect certain groups of staff more than others, particularly those who work in the branch network, shift workers and part-time workers.

2. Compromising the voluntary aspect of volunteering

There is a fine line between actively encouraging involvement in employee volunteering and making it compulsory, either by formal inclusion in personal development plans (PDPs) or through managers asking staff to get involved. Including volunteering in PDPs demonstrates top-down support for employee volunteering and thereby sanctions the time off work that may be necessary to take part. Furthermore, if employee volunteering is to be part of a human resources development strategy (that is, if it is to function as explicit training or staff development) then the impacts on staff must be evaluated in line with an individual’s



performance in other areas of work. However, there is a danger that such management strategies can over-formalise employee volunteering and undermine motivation and commitment.

3. Information sharing

One of the biggest reasons for staff not getting involved was a lack of information about the various schemes and time off work policies. Volunteers and community partners alike did not feel that Barclays received enough publicity for the work it does in the community. Barclays could therefore do more to provide information about the Community Programme and the activities undertaken by volunteers, both within and outside the company.

4. The best deal for the community

While organisations on the whole were pleased with the success of volunteering projects that involved Barclays' staff, a number did suggest that there were other, potentially more useful ways in which a partnership with a large financial institution such as Barclays might help them. This would involve a switch from the current over-emphasis on painting, decorating and gardening (which currently accounts for 80% of activities undertaken by Barclays employee volunteers) to more explicitly utilising job-related skills such as marketing, accountancy and business planning.

About the research

The findings presented in this research summary are based on the results of survey data and one-to-one interviews and focus groups. The research was carried out between April and July 2004.

Three different self-completion questionnaires were distributed to Barclays staff: we surveyed 2,000 volunteers, 800 managers and 800 staff who had not volunteered through Barclays. To explore the impacts of volunteers on the community, we also sent questionnaires to 500 organisations that had received volunteers from Barclays. We received 1,106 completed questionnaires in total, giving an average response rate of 28%.

Qualitative case studies were conducted in three locations in England. Each case study comprised a focus group with employee volunteers, a focus group with managers or team leaders and face-to-face interviews with organisations receiving volunteers from Barclays. In total 33 Barclays staff members participated in focus groups. In addition 12 interviews were conducted with organisations.



**Institute for
Volunteering
Research**

Regent's Wharf
8 All Saints Street
London N1 9RL
Telephone: +44 (0) 20 7520 8900
Facsimile: +44 (0) 20 7520 8910
Email: instvolres@aol.com
www.ivr.org.uk

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