

# Sample Policy: Volunteerism Leave

The following sample policies were excerpted from [The Book of Company Policies](#), published by HR Specialist, © 2007. Edit for your organization's purposes.

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## Sample Policy 1:

“While it is the intention of this policy to provide all employees the opportunity to become involved in their community, approval from direct supervision must be obtained when time away from work is involved. If the volunteer activity is company-sponsored but can only occur during core work hours, then time away from work will be considered time spent on company business. If the volunteer activity is not company-sponsored, flextime should be utilized. Prior to committing to volunteer activities requiring time away from work, it is the employee’s responsibility to discuss with his or her supervisor the impact such activity will have on the employee’s work performance.

“In addition, in consultation with employees involved in company-sponsored programs, human resources, management, and/or the employees’ direct supervisor will determine whether the volunteer activity should be viewed as a source for career development. If community service fills a company business need and is part of an employee’s development plan, the activity will be considered an objective in the performance management process. Involvement in company-sponsored programs and initiatives is not mandatory.”

## Sample Policy 2:

“The company has a formalized policy regarding paid release time, which the company refers to as ‘community service time’ and defines as ‘the contribution of time and work to a group or organization for the advancement, assistance or enrichment of the community.’

“All full- and part-time employees at the headquarters office are eligible for community service time immediately upon date of hire. Full-time employees working 30 or more hours a week receive 40 hours of community service time per calendar year (16 hours of company-sponsored service time plus 24 hours of company and/or individual service time). Part-time employees working less than 30 hours per week receive 20 hours of community service time per calendar year (8 hours of company-sponsored service time plus 12 hours of company and/or individual service time). Employees in our retail branches can utilize community service time after six months from date of hire.

“Our written policy states that the company ‘will not approve as service any activity for an organization that does not comply with the company policy of nondiscrimination; that has primarily a political focus . . . or that

has primarily a religious focus.’’

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## WHAT'S AT ISSUE:

Companies can combine work/life balance with business interests and community improvement by encouraging employees to donate some of their work hours to community service. This is paid volunteer work, meaning that the company pays employees their usual wage for the time they devote to community projects.

Volunteer release time programs can take several forms. Many companies allow employees to work on volunteer activities during normal, paid hours for a set amount of time per month or per year. Some grant matching time, allowing an employee to volunteer for a set amount of time during paid work hours, provided the employee does an equal amount of volunteering during off hours. Some send employees to a community-wide volunteer day or create their own companywide day. Others allow paid social service leave, in which an employee or group of employees work full time for a month or more on a specific project with a community organization. Often the business identifies particular projects or organizations to support and gets some public relations mileage out of the effort.

Besides providing a public service, employers are offering volunteer leave for a number of reasons. Releasing employees for community service sends a message that the company is committed to supporting employee interests outside the workplace. Employees feel valued as people, and job candidates are more likely to join the company.

## POLICY CONSIDERATIONS:

A small company can provide release time for employees on an informal basis. Larger companies will want a written policy to communicate their commitment to volunteerism and to avoid confusion and inconsistency. The Global Business Responsibility Resource Center recommends the following steps:

**Decide on the type of program.** Common choices are (1) work release, in which the company sets an amount of paid time each employee can take during regular business hours; (2) matching time, in which the company grants a set amount of paid time and requires the employee to match it with volunteer time outside business hours; (3) social service leave, by which the company grants paid leave (two weeks up to one year) to an employee or group to work full time on a special community project.

**Outline eligibility requirements.** How long must an employee work for the company to be eligible for volunteerism leave? Are both salaried and hourly employees eligible? Both full-time and part-time employees (on a prorated basis)? What types of volunteer work count for release time—anything the employee chooses or only company-sponsored programs?

**Enlist senior management to communicate the policy.** Your staff is more likely to believe the company is truly encouraging the program if they hear it from the top.

**Ensure support from middle management.** Middle managers are often the most resistant to release-time policies—they're the ones most focused on trying to get things done. Inform middle managers about any volunteerism program you're considering, and allow for their input. Suggest team volunteer efforts, which build departmental cohesion and help middle managers see the benefits.

**Recognize employees who volunteer.** Award ceremonies, lunches, articles in the company newsletter and such will show employees that the company values their volunteer efforts.