

Introduction

The Employee Service Initiative (ESI) was proposed in the External Affairs DEI Committee Year-End Report in November 2022 and in the subsequent Nine-Point Plan. ESI embodies the spirit of the DEI Committee's Statement on Furthering Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion; and the initiative holds the principles and values set forth in the statement.

The Employee Service Initiative was proposed and framed by Sharon Freeman in 2022 while serving as the DEI Committee co-lead. The proposal was accepted and moved forward for implementation by the Learning, Education & Development (LED) subcommittee of the EA DEI Committee in 2023.

Summary

The Employee Service Initiative is a concept that was derived from the Growth in Leadership Initiative, which states that we should embrace opportunities to learn and grow in the areas of self-examination, education, and service. The goal of ESI is to strengthen ties to the community through engagement and making personal connections with the community in which we reside. ESI will build the structure for a diverse, developmental network that both serves and shares our talents and various disciplines to help create access and build equity for our neighboring community. ESI strives to honor the community with good citizenship and by cultivating growth and learning for our staff and for the communities that we seek to serve.

The framework for furthering the Employee Service Initiative includes the following recommendations:

- Paid employee volunteer time off (two days annually);
- Organized group service days;
- Paid summer internships/job offers/mentorship programs for community;
- Collaboration with Government & Community Affairs;
- External Affairs employee service recognition; and
- Sustained, long-term programs with community partners.

Implementation Proposal

The LED subcommittee is interested in pursuing several ideas as part of the ESI. At this time, we propose a 1) Volunteer Time Off (VTO) Policy; and a 2) Group Service Days Policy be implemented first. The subcommittee is actively discussing other ideas and expects to bring future proposals to EA leadership as they are developed.

The proposed effective date for VTO and the Annual Group Service Day is October 1, 2023, through May 31, 2024 with the goal to align with the External Affairs Work From Home Flexbank policy on June 1, 2024.

Volunteer Time Off

Policy and Guidelines

The Volunteer Time Off (VTO) Policy provides all eligible full-time EA employees with two full days of paid time off annually, to engage in volunteer/service activities that enhance and serve the communities in which we live and work.

The goal of this policy is to encourage and empower staff to participate in service activities and support causes that are important to them and that further the employee's understanding of leadership, diversity, equity, and inclusion. We believe this is an important way to provide staff the opportunity to strengthen their ties to the community in meaningful and impactful ways. As an initiative from the EA DEI Committee, we also believe these activities can broaden and reinforce the department's diversity and inclusion goals.

The VTO policy will be administered and tracked in a similar way to the Work From Home Flexbank. Employees will seek approval from their managers at least two weeks in advance so managers can consider the business needs of their unit. In cases where the request cannot be made two weeks in advance, employees are encouraged to ask their managers anyway.

Employees must be in good standing with a Performance Evaluation score of 3 or higher to be eligible for VTO days. New employees will be eligible to use VTO after their initial probationary period is completed.

Selected service activities and organizations will be left to the discretion of the employee. However, LED will provide general guidelines about what kinds of activities are and are not eligible for use of VTO.

Generally, activities supporting the work of food banks, schools and educational-related activities, healthcare, social justice organizations, and organizations that help the indigent, elderly, homeless, and disabled communities will be eligible for VTO, provided such activities do not personally benefit the employee or their immediate family members. Volunteer activities for political organizations and campaigns are not eligible for VTO. The LED subcommittee will create an informational directory of local community organizations and activities to provide to our colleagues. The directory would serve as a resource for colleagues who may be seeking ideas for how to engage in meaningful community engagement. We will also include contact information if colleagues want to reach out to discuss opportunities or ask questions.

Employees will not be required to provide proof of their service, as we feel that would conflict with the spirit of the program. We recommend using the honor system for VTO days taken, and we trust that our colleagues will use this policy as it is intended. We further recommend that employees share their volunteer and service experiences with their colleagues to create engagement around service and community building.

We will track volunteer and service activities of EA employees so the hours and service can be identified in GCA's reports to the City of Boston about BU's contributions to the city.

Unused VTO days cannot roll-over.

We strongly encourage EA Senior Leadership to use VTO and to encourage their staff to use it as well.

Annual Group Service Day

Policy and Guidelines

The Annual Group Service Day policy would provide the opportunity for eligible full-time EA staff to participate in scheduled group service days at organizations in the Boston area. This would be separate from and in addition to the VTO allowance. It would be an opportunity for staff across EA to join collectively outside of the office and to connect in a meaningful way that furthers the goals of community building, leadership, diversity, equity, and inclusion.

As a first step, we will pilot this policy with the EA DEI Committee in the Fall of 2023. The pilot will give us the data to build the framework, work out logistics, and serve as a model for the larger group service day that includes all of EA.

We will choose community organizations and service activities that reinforce dignity and shared humanity. We will discuss as a subcommittee whether we would like our first activity to have direct interaction with a specific population or whether it is a service activity that is more behind the scenes. We also feel it is important that, before the activity, participating staff orient themselves with the organization and how to serve mindfully.

Finally, if we do recommend scaling this initiative to all External Affairs, we will seek coordination with the Fun Committee so that each group is aware of the other's efforts to plan similar events.