



Vale Centre for Voluntary Services  
Canolfan Gwasanaethau  
Gwirfoddol y Fro

# Vale Voluntary Sector Business Links Handbook



*Voluntary, Business and Public Sector Organisations  
working together for the benefit of the community.*

**COMMUNITY  
FUND**  
*Lottery money making a difference*



Supporting Voluntary Action in the  
Vale of Glamorgan

Yn rhoi cefnogaeth i weithredu gwirfoddol  
ym Mro Morgannwg

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VCVS' Business Links Scheme is supported by  
the Community Fund

# Vale Centre for Voluntary Services

## Vale Voluntary Sector Business Links Handbook

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## Business Links – the story so far

The title of the 1979 song, “From small things (big things one day come)”, written by Bruce Springsteen aptly describes the progress made by the Business Links Scheme since its inception in 1998. The aim of the scheme was to enable voluntary and community groups serving the Vale to gain the support of and work in partnership with private and public sector organisations.

So, what sort of benefits have voluntary and community groups received over the years? The following will give you an idea of the scheme’s success.

- Over one hundred groups have received support of one kind or another.
- Over fifty private and public organisations have actively participated and supported local groups.
- The financial value of *Gifts in time, kind and cash* has been conservatively estimated at well over **£250,000**.
- There has been a wide variety of support ranging from a sponsored Christmas lunch to free Health and Safety training, donations of furniture & computers to the secondment of personnel.

It is not only the voluntary sector that has benefited from the scheme. Business and public sector organisations also realise the value of engaging with local communities. There has been, and will continue to be, a willingness by the business and public sectors to support and work with groups serving the Vale. However, as funding for the scheme comes to an end in December 2004 it will be necessary, in the future, for groups to take the initiative and be pro-active with this work. The *Business Links Handbook* will help groups with this task by providing them with appropriate information.

## **The benefits for the business and public sectors**

The success of any Business Links is dependant on the active involvement of businesses and public sector bodies. Voluntary groups will find it useful to understand why they participate and the benefits that they gain.

The term Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is used extensively to cover this activity. The word Corporate implies large organisations and this will be true for companies such as BT, Centrica and Barclays Bank. However, the underlying principles of CSR are just as valid for small and medium enterprises (SME). A different approach to CSR will need to be taken by SMEs to take account of the difference in size. Although there is a general perception by SMEs that involvement would be time consuming, this is not the reality encountered by those already actively involved.

Many companies are finding that to continue to be successful and profitable they must pay more attention to the ethical demands of their customers, shareholders and investors. They realise that customers are becoming more selective about who they shop with, while shareholders and investors have a greater expectation of them to act as “good citizens”, whether on a local or global scale. Companies that act in a socially responsible manner are more likely to gain the goodwill of local communities, who in turn offer them the “licence to operate”.

Companies that incorporate CSR programmes as part of their core business activities realise that it makes good business sense. As well as the potential to build trust in the company and generate sales, it also offers opportunities for staff development and enhances motivation and enthusiasm within the workforce. People are more likely to want to work for a company that has such an enlightened outlook and to stay longer once employed. A good reputation wins loyalty from both customers and employees and opens doors to other opportunities. There is even the possibility for businesses to gain tax relief on some of these activities.

# Support available to the Voluntary Sector

Since the Business Link Scheme's inception in 1998 it has been possible to build up a comprehensive list of activities identified by voluntary sector groups that both business and public sector organisations have been able to support. The types of activities can be generally be placed under three broad headings:

*Gifts in time* – activities that cover personal involvement and time.

*Gifts in Kind* – the use of physical equipment or space.

*Gifts in cash* – financial support.

It is likely that groups would gain as much, if not more, benefit from support in time and kind rather than cash. For many large businesses “giving money” is no longer the favoured way to support the voluntary sector. They prefer the option of interaction that gifts in time offer. SMEs are more inclined to provide small cash donations as an initial response to requests for assistance. However, this does not help them to build a strategic approach to CSR. It is important that whatever support is provided offers the best match for all concerned.

The following is the list of the most requested types of activities identified by voluntary groups that business and public sector organisations have been able to support.

*Gifts in time:*

- “Pro-bono” professional service/advice e.g. legal, (HR) personnel, finance, marketing/PR, health & safety etc.
- Mentoring via a “buddy” or “coach” to assist with learning and understanding of key business skills e.g. business/financial planning.

- Training - provision of trainers or allocation of places on courses.
- Secondments – minimum of three months duration (full or part-time).
- Volunteers – individual or group

*Gifts in kind:*

- Use of accommodation for meetings, training and storage.
- Donation of surplus and redundant office equipment and resources in good condition e.g. desks, cabinets, chairs, trays etc.
- Loan or use of equipment such as audio visual aids.
- Donation of surplus and redundant computing equipment in good condition e.g. PCs, laptops, printers, mouse mats etc.
- Computer software, subject to licence agreements.
- Transport e.g. use of vehicles.

*Gifts in cash:*

- Sponsorship.
- Donations – cash or in-kind.
- Bulk and discount buying.

More detailed information about some of these activities is provided in the Handbook. The Useful Contacts section includes details of organisations that groups can access for assistance.

## Contacting potential supporters

For many groups, making an approach to a business or public sector body for support will be something new. Before taking this step it is vital that groups plan how they are going to do this. They must focus on the need for their request, why it is important and the benefits they will gain. They should also consider who they are going to approach, how they do this and when to make contact. An inappropriate request or approach for support is a waste of valuable time and resources that groups can ill afford. It can also portray a poor image, not only of that group, but the voluntary sector as a whole.

Voluntary and community groups are not the only organisations that seek support from the business and public sectors. Others such as Business in the Community and the Education Business Partnership also rely on them to support the programmes they run. They should not, however, be viewed as competitors. They are encouraging businesses to be active participants and that can only be good for communities as a whole. It does, however, highlight the need for groups to make any approach for support in a professional and business like manner. So what must you do to make your request worth considering?

### **Step 1 - *identify your exact requirements.***

Will an approach to a business or public body be the most appropriate way to satisfy your specific need?

What type of support are you looking for in terms of gifts in time, kind or cash?

Remember to focus on the need and benefits of the request and why it is important.

### **Step 2 – *decide which organisation to approach.***

You need to do some research to ensure that you make contact with the

most appropriate organisation. You are looking for information about a company's links with the community. This can be found in a number of ways, from reading company annual reports to surfing on the world wide web (Internet). The latter is probably the most effective method, with more and more companies making use of this technology to provide information about their organisation.

You need to find out what the company focus is in respect of their links with the community. The information you require may be filed under a number of different headings depending on the company. The most common areas are Community Relations, Community Links and Social Policy. Most large Companies have well planned programmes, both national and local, already in place that fit in with the overall company strategy. They will be looking to focus their support in ways that best match the core function of their business. You will need to see if your request matches their aims. Local branches of large corporations may have some discretion about supporting local activities. Others may refer requests back to their head office.

SMEs are likely to take a more flexible approach to how they support their local communities. Their involvement may well be limited by their size and available resources. Even so, they too will need to see what is the "best match or fit" for them.

### **Step 3 – *find out who you should contact.***

It may be useful before starting this exercise to find out if anyone within or connected with your group has any existing links with the organisations you have identified. You may have employees, trustees, volunteers or someone they know who could advise as to who would be the person to contact. If this option is not available, then you will need to try and find out who to contact. Again, using the internet or reading annual reports could provide you with the person's name or title. If necessary you could even ring the company and ask for this information. You may be looking

for the Community Relations Manager, Head of Community Support or PR Manager amongst the titles commonly used in larger companies. With SMEs it could be the actual boss of the firm that you need to contact. Being able to put your request to a named person is a distinct advantage though it does not guarantee success.

#### **Step 4 – *decide how you will make the approach.***

The final step is to decide how you are going to put across your request for support. Are you going to send a letter, use e-mail, phone the person or arrange a meeting? The opportunity to put your case to someone face to face is ideal. However, it is highly likely that this will not happen unless you have been introduced before. Whether meeting the person or speaking on the telephone, it is imperative that you put your case over in a positive and confident manner. Be certain of your facts and be prepared to answer any questions they may ask. If you decide to write a letter or send an e-mail be sure to address it to the right person and try to keep it short i.e. one page. Again, be positive and state what you are looking for, why you are asking them and what the benefits are for both parties. Be sure to state that you will contact them again to find out if they are able to provide support.

You must be sure to tailor your request to suit the audience with whom you are dealing. Large companies and SMEs have different ways of working and you must try to pitch your case for support at the right level. Don't get disheartened if you do not receive a positive reply. Look around for other potential supporters and make sure that you focus both on your needs and theirs to get the "best match or fit". You must be able to offer them something that is attractive and provides positive opportunities for them to engage with their local communities. Remember that you are not alone in vying for their support. Businesses are being asked to support numerous initiatives that cover a wide variety of issues and there is only a certain amount of time and goodwill that even the most committed business supporter can provide.

## **“Do’s and don’ts”**

- make sure your need is correctly identified
- check that it cannot be met by any other means
- be certain of the type of support you require
- check out and research organisations to approach
- make sure your need matches their focus
- check if you have or know anyone who has connections
- find the name or title of the person to contact
- decide on the most appropriate method of approach
- don’t send letters or e-mails to all and sundry
- be positive, confident and sure of your facts
- state the benefits for your group and their organisation
- pitch your approach at the right level for your audience
- don’t be put off by a negative response
- don’t give up – approach another suitable organisation

## **Mentoring - a personal “buddy” or “coach”**

In 2000 VCVS piloted the Vale Voluntary Sector Mentoring Scheme. The scheme was designed to enable managers within the voluntary sector to identify aspects of their work with which they needed assistance. A manager from the business or public sector would then be sought with whom they could “buddy up” to address their particular issues. The scheme covered two main areas - enhancement of business and management skills and assistance with project work.

Voluntary organisations are run by committed and enthusiastic people and for many the overall responsibility of the running of the organisation is probably down to one or two people. They are expected to cover all the usual work aspects, from developing and implementing the overall strategy to business and financial planning and dealing with personnel (HR) issues. To address any skills or knowledge shortfalls they may seek specialist help or buy-in expertise to deal with particular issues as and when they arise. However, it would be more beneficial if they were to gain a better appreciation of these managerial tasks. One way they can do this is to link with someone who has that expertise and who is willing to provide appropriate coaching to enable them to gain or enhance their own knowledge and skills.

### *Identifying the need*

The Vale Mentoring scheme is a very personal activity for both the mentor (buddy/coach) and mentee (voluntary manager). It will be for the mentee to decide on their specific needs. This may have arisen out of a work related activity or may have been identified when considering personal development needs. It may be decided that attendance on a training course would be a more appropriate way to deal with the issue. Mentoring is a useful way to enhance existing skill levels and boost personal confidence. It can also be used to pass on knowledge and experience about unfamiliar activities such as planning an event.

### *Who to approach*

Mentoring can be a very useful and productive way for a business to show support for their local community. It also has other benefits, such as providing opportunities for the personal development of employees. Large organisations may be able to offer more assistance than SMEs, due to their size and available resources. However, this should not preclude SMEs from consideration, as they may also possess the exact skills and knowledge that you may be seeking. Depending on your identified need it may be appropriate to focus on a certain sector for support e.g. financial, marketing/PR. Remember, it is not only people currently working who have the skills and knowledge you may be seeking. Retired people have a wealth of experience to offer and importantly, more time available in which to do so.

### *Time required*

The actual amount and duration of coaching required will be dependant on the individual need of the voluntary manager or the specific task in question. It may be possible that only one or two sessions will be required to provide the necessary assistance. However, it is likely that most mentoring pairings will require a number of sessions to cover all the required elements. How long each session lasts will vary depending on the specific needs of the mentee. It will be for both participants to discuss and agree the time commitment and the length and frequency of contact at the outset. It is also important for both to agree when the need has been satisfied and the mentoring should end.

### *Mode of communication*

It would be beneficial for the first meeting, at least, to be held face to face when most of the on-going arrangements can be agreed. Although face to face meetings would probably be the preferred mode throughout the duration of the scheme, it is recognised that this will not always be possible. It is perfectly acceptable to provide support by telephone or e-mail. This would be particularly useful in situations where the mentee requires information or guidance about a particular point or needs assistance at short notice.

## Secondments

One of the most beneficial ways in which business and public sector organisations can support and work with the voluntary sector is through the placement of people on secondment. This is a major commitment and investment in time and money and can lead to the formation of long term partnerships, with the added benefit of broadening the activities that are supported. A secondment is normally for a minimum of three months duration and can be either full time or part time e.g. 2 or 3 days per week. Whatever the period there are a number of essential points that voluntary organisations must cover if they are thinking of making an approach for support.

1. Provide a job description – this is vital to enable the seconding organisation to understand and appreciate why they should consider your request. Whether it is to cover for the absence of an employee, or to manage a new project, it is important to know exactly what the person will be doing and what experience and skills are required.
2. Ensure that an induction programme is arranged for the secondee. This will not only provide them with useful information about your organisation but will also help in creating an effective working relationship.
3. Provide any appropriate training that will enable the secondee to carry out their duties safely and efficiently.
4. Ensure that issues surrounding line management, absences, holidays, pay, etc, are agreed with the seconding organisation before the secondee starts with you.
5. Arrange for regular reviews to take place with the secondee to confirm that the placement is proceeding to plan and that they are still comfortable with the arrangement.

6. Communicate regularly with the seconding organisation to keep them abreast of how things are progressing. They will wish to know how their secondee is getting on.

There are a number of reasons why business and public sector organisations should wish to support requests for secondments. One of the main ones is that it is an ideal way to provide personal development opportunities for employees. At the same time as contributing to the work of your group, the secondee will be developing skills and gaining experience in a different work environment. Another reason for providing support is that it offers the opportunity for people to consider career changes. This is particularly relevant for people who are thinking of taking early retirement, but who do not wish to stop working. Finally, it offers business and public bodies the opportunity to get to know more about a particular group or voluntary sector and this may have a major influence in the development of their CSR strategy.

A number of successful placements have been arranged through the Business Links Scheme with the Inland Revenue. VCVS and George Thomas Hospice Care have both benefited from secondees working on specific projects. On completion of their placements they returned to the Inland Revenue having gained valuable experience working in the voluntary sector.

Barclays Bank operates a very successful placement programme for employees who are leaving the company, such as people taking early retirement. Placements are identified and agreements reached with the host organisations, who benefit from the skills and experience that the employees bring. In addition Barclays also provides a financial package for a limited period to support the placement. Three VCVS member groups, Amelia Trust Farm, Ogmore Centre Trust and St. Donats Arts Centre have been able to participate in the programme.

## Useful Contacts

As a result of the Business Links Scheme a number of arrangements have been agreed with local organisations that voluntary groups will be able to access.

VCVS member group Track 2000 recycles surplus and redundant furniture and computing equipment. Should you wish to make use of this service please contact Tony Crocker on 029 2033 2540 or e-mail [tony@can-online.org.uk](mailto:tony@can-online.org.uk).

Computers in the Community, another VCVS member, refurbishes and recycles donated computers into the community. If you would like to use their service they can be contacted on 029 2046 3693 or visit their website at [www.citcwales.org.uk](http://www.citcwales.org.uk).

Business in the Community's "Wales Cares" programme provides volunteering opportunities for people in the business sector to support their local communities. For more information contact Tracy Rees, on 029 2043 6915 or e-mail [tracy.rees@bitc.org.uk](mailto:tracy.rees@bitc.org.uk).

Business in the Community also administers the ProHelp scheme, a network of professional firms that are committed to providing free professional advice and support to the voluntary sector. If you have a project that you would like BitC to consider you can contact Roger Bassett-Jones on 029 2043 6919 or e-mail [roger.jones@bitc.org.uk](mailto:roger.jones@bitc.org.uk).

Other organisations that you may find useful are:

REACH is a charity set up to persuade managerial and professional people to offer their skills on a voluntary basis. You can find out more information at their website [www.volwork.org.uk](http://www.volwork.org.uk) or contact Elwyn Prosser on 029 2040 8439.

Another website for accessing free professional services can be found at [www.professionals4free.org.uk](http://www.professionals4free.org.uk)

The legal sector has a number of useful websites with information about pro-bono professional services including [www.probonouk.net](http://www.probonouk.net), the Bar in the Community Scheme [www.barprobono.org.uk](http://www.barprobono.org.uk) and the Solicitors ProBono Group [www.probonogroup.org.uk](http://www.probonogroup.org.uk) or ring 0870 777 5601.

Business Community Connections is a registered charity, which aims to help charities obtain support from business. If you would like more information you can visit their website [www.bcconnections.org.uk](http://www.bcconnections.org.uk) or call 020 8875 5700.

In Kind Direct is a charity that distributes primarily surplus new goods and refurbished office equipment from the corporate sector to the voluntary sector for a fraction of their real worth. To find out more about their services you can look at their website [www.inkinddirect.org](http://www.inkinddirect.org) or call 020 7860 5930.

Leonard Cheshire Charities Buying Group is a dedicated service operated by a world class charity, offering a range of purchasing agreements that will help other charities reduce expenditure and, by reducing cost, help them to make better use of their money.

Visit [www.charitiesbuyinggroup.co.uk](http://www.charitiesbuyinggroup.co.uk) for more information.

IT4Communities, the national IT volunteer programme, is on the look out for more projects. Phone Paula Graham 020 7796 2144, e-mail [info@it4communities.org.uk](mailto:info@it4communities.org.uk) or visit [www.it4communities.org.uk](http://www.it4communities.org.uk).

Training courses can also a useful way of finding out how to make contact with potential supporters, in particular courses dealing with fundraising. The Wales Council for Voluntary Action, amongst others, runs such courses and information can be obtained by ringing 0870 607 1666 or visit [www.wcva.org.uk](http://www.wcva.org.uk).

## **Business Links—the way forward**

People are the most important asset for any business and it is likely that many, be they directors, managers or staff will have had personal involvement with the voluntary sector. This could be through the act of volunteering, such as running a guide or scout group, acting as a school governor or fundraising for an organisation. It is also possible that some may have used the services of the sector, such as those provided by support groups for carers. Whatever the reason for engagement, this ethos of working with the voluntary sector can be harnessed by groups to help identify and access the support they require. It can also be used by businesses and public bodies to develop and implement their CSR strategy.

The Business Links Scheme has been successful in providing opportunities for organisations from all sectors to work together. It will be the responsibility of groups to create and maintain links in the future. There are over a thousand voluntary groups actively serving communities in the Vale, together with thousands of businesses, small and large, and a large public sector presence. Everyone has an interest in creating vibrant, healthy and active communities in which they live, work and play. The ingredients are there for developing successful partnerships that will provide benefits for all concerned.

The Handbook will enable you to look to the future and help you to build positive links that will benefit your group. It can be referred to when new initiatives and programmes are introduced that further encourage partnership working across the sectors. There is an abundance of goodwill and commitment amongst organisations from all sectors to make a success of this activity. So, be positive and confident as you seek support. As the headline for the scheme states:

**Business Links - “A winning combination”**



