ENGAGE
Practical guide to partnerships involving employee volunteering
Why bring schools and companies together?

"Bringing schools and companies together is one of BECI’s hobby horses. For many years, the worlds of business and education have evolved separately, without any real consultation or pooling of efforts. Bridges were lacking between the two. These bridges had to be built gradually and exchanges are now increasing. This project, which brings volunteers from companies into schools, is proof of the need for such exchanges.

Why do we do it?
Because we are trying to bring answers to unemployment figures in the Brussels Capital Region. Today, it is estimated that one in five young people in the region leave school without a diploma, and that 25% of young people aged between 18 and 24 are unemployed.

How do we do it?
With support from the local authorities, we have created strong partnerships, starting with requests from schools that we matched with different volunteering opportunities available inside companies. And it was a success, bringing value to all partners!

We hope that this practical guide will not only help to ensure continuation of the project, but will also allow you to directly witness the rich way in which students and companies collaborate. We look forward to receiving your feedback on this promising experience in the near future. This will allow our partners to continue their efforts to generate best practices and tools for corporate volunteering. Enjoy the ride!"

Olivier Willcox
Chief Executive Officer, BECI, Brussels Enterprises Commerce and Industry

BECI helps businesses by representing them and defending their interests in Brussels in their dealings with local, federal and international authorities.
Why promote partnerships between profit and non-profit? What value does it bring to young people and employees?

“As the Belgian Network for Sustainability, The Shift facilitates partnerships between companies and civil organizations. Improving youth employability is a challenge in the Belgian context. We believe that through multi-stakeholder collaboration we can develop innovative solutions. The projects in this guide are aimed at building bridges between young people and businesses through experience sharing. They receive very positive feedback both from young people, who feel listened to and coached, and employee volunteers, who are able to share their experience and feel useful. Both discover worlds they know little about.”

Sabine Denis
co-Executive Officer at The Shift

What is the objective of this guide? Why does Accenture participate in employee volunteering projects?

“This practical guide is a way to inspire you to think about new partnerships, convergence between private, social and public actors that creates more impact in society. I’m often asked why we participate in these projects. For Accenture, it’s a way to broaden our social horizons and give something back to society in a differentiated way. I agree it isn’t always easy to find a common project, but by taking it step-by-step I’m convinced it’s possible. Our employees derive tremendous value from participating in volunteering projects. They develop a better understanding of their environment and they develop skills that are also important in their interactions with our clients. Ultimately, our employees and all participants benefit from these projects. ‘Skills to Succeed’—the global focus of Accenture’s Corporate Citizenship program and corporate social responsibility efforts—is helping to equip disadvantaged people around the world with skills that open doors to employment and economic opportunity.”

Olivier Gillerot
Managing Director Accenture, Sponsor The Shift
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1. Why get involved?

The involvement of companies in society is not new. Companies interact with communities in many ways, not only through their commercial activities, but also through their employees, philanthropy and corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives. They are aware that their role goes beyond making profit; they have a responsibility to support the communities in which they operate.

One way to directly contribute to society can be by offering employees the opportunity to get involved in volunteering programs. On the other hand, schools and social organizations know at best the needs of their students or youngsters in the neighborhood.

Through collaborating with other types of actors, such as companies, they can share competences and provide access to the business world for youngsters. This is a way for companies to build a bridge with youngsters from the local neighborhood and can result in boosting their future employability. Partnerships between such different stakeholders demand time, effort and money. But they create an impact that can only be leveraged by working together.

Working with the ‘unusual suspects’ creates enriching partnerships that stimulate all those involved to think in different ways, to embrace different perspectives and interests, and opens the door to innovative solutions and projects. It is a unique opportunity to work towards a common goal: to facilitate the professional integration of youngsters.

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1 In Flanders these initiatives are often part of the CSR program of an enterprise, ‘Maatschappelijk Verantwoord Ondernemen (MVO)’.
This practical guide is designed to support actors from different sectors (public/private) and backgrounds (social/business) to work in partnership. It aims to help schools, social organizations and companies to build a common project, find the right partners and ensure all parties benefit from this experience. For each step of a partnership, the guide offers a number of ‘Keys for success’ and ‘Challenges’.

This approach is based on the experience of the Engage platform—initiated by Brussels Enterprises Commerce and Industry (BECI) and The Shift with the support of Accenture—aimed at the co-creation of partnerships between profit and non-profit organizations through employee volunteering initiatives that support the socioeconomic inclusion of young people. Two examples of successful initiatives are presented in the guide to inspire new partnerships and projects.
2. How to start

2.1 Identify your target group and organizational needs

Identify the needs you want to tackle with a partner. Start with your objective and the needs of your target group, then your organizational needs. This will help identify the type of projects you will build and the type of partner(s) you should look for.

For example, students in the third year of technical studies can be demotivated because they arrived in their option by default and cannot visualize what their future job could be. Here the need is to find a way to motivate them, valorize their studies and give them an opportunity to see where they are heading by making working life more concrete (through companies visits, testimonials...). In the same neighborhood as the school, there may be a company offering a technical product or service. Employees of that company may want to engage in a local project and share their experience with young people, which is also a way to learn more about the youngsters they pass each day in the street. There is a potential match between the needs of both organizations.

Keys for success

- Start with your target group and organizational needs.
- Identify what you can offer to a partner to find a common interest.
- Start with 'urgent needs', and then the 'nice to have' will follow as the partnership evolves.
- Be transparent from the beginning about your need(s) and interest(s). This will help to define clear and realistic objectives and manage expectations.

Challenges

- This is a volunteering project; nobody should be pushed to get involved. But once committed, the project should be delivered with the same degree of professionalism as other work projects.
- To build a long-term relationship, take sufficient time to get to know each other well and identify your needs and common interests: consult beneficiaries and other important stakeholders.
2.2 Identify which organization could be the best partner

First identify for yourself the kind of partnership you are looking for. This will depend on what you want to achieve, what you can offer and the results you want to achieve through the partnership. Think about what you can offer as a partner.

This can include knowledge, experience, contacts with target groups, financial support...

Also try to look for partners with a mutual interest, that are situated in the same area or addressing the same target groups.

If you work in a school with mechanics students, a logical partner for company visits would be in the automotive sector. If you work for a recruitment and selection company, you could share your knowledge and at the same time challenge and improve your practices by starting a partnership with a social organization that works with disadvantaged youngsters, helping them to work on their presentation skills.

Keys for success

- Before approaching a possible partner, take the time to understand who they are, their mission and values and see if there is a potential match with your organizational profile.

Challenges

- Finding the right partner means an ‘objective’ match and not just the first organization you meet that seems enthusiastic.
- Be careful of enthusiasm: partners often underestimate the time involved in a project.
- Finding a partner with whom you can create added value for all parties.

2.3 Meet the partner

Because you are initiating a partnership with an organization from another sector, it will take some time to get to know each other and each other’s culture.

Organizing several meetings with one or more schools, companies or organizations will help you find a good match. Having a good match increases the chances of a successful partnership.

Keys for success

- Finding the right partner can take time. To increase your chances of success, seek out other partners with experience, networks or specialists to help you detect potential partners.
- Clearly describe the profile of beneficiaries and volunteers to manage expectations.
- Visit potential future partners on site.
- Be open about your needs and what you can offer.

Challenges

- Be aware that some organizations have a long decision making process.
- Finding companies that are willing to set up a partnership with a school or a social organization can be challenging.
2.4 Identify potential projects

Once you have clarified your need(s) and identified a partner, explore which innovative solutions you could develop together.

This can range from coaching activities in schools and company visits to training and internships. Think out of the box!

Consult your leadership, colleagues, employees, students, teachers, and members... The more input you have, the more ideas you will generate.

For example, in the case of a school and a company wishing to collaborate on helping students develop job-finding skills, they could develop a project to explain working life. This could be done through testimonials and company visits, asking a human resources manager to present his/her expectations when recruiting, organizing internships, inviting students to attend company training programs, participating as jury members to evaluate the students’ final work before graduation...

From the perspective of company employees, being invited to give testimonials can valorize their work, and giving interview training to youngsters from different backgrounds can be enlightening in terms of diverse competences and experiences. The school can also offer services to the company, for example, hosting a company event or organizing training for employees based on methods used by teachers, for example, conflict management...

Keys for success

- Think out of the box, for example, to improve students' language skills, organize exchanges between a Dutch-speaking school and French-speaking employees.
- Involve beneficiaries in generating ideas for projects that meet their needs.
- Remember it is a partnership: each partner must do its share of the work.

Challenges

- Allocate resources to develop the project. Setting up a partnership requires a strong leader who has the time and power to make necessary decisions
- Start small but with the possibility for long-term evolution.
2.5 Define the resources you can allocate to the project

Setting up a partnership means allocating time, capacities, people and/or budget to the project. As we all know, time and budget are limited. Therefore, it is very important to be realistic about the resources you can dedicate to the project.

For example, if you want to organize one-to-one workshops for unemployed youngsters on how to write a CV, do an interview, find a job on Internet, etc., you should calculate how many youngsters you can mobilize as well as employee volunteers to animate the workshops. You will need to find a venue to organize the event, foresee catering and materials. Responsibilities for overall coordination, communications, materials, catering, youngsters briefing, volunteers briefing etc., can be divided between the partners. The costs can also be shared.

Keys for success

• Have a clearly identified leader for the project in each partner organization.
• Sit down with all the partners to define the project’s objectives and practical steps as well as the different responsibilities. Divide tasks and responsibilities between the organizations in function of each partner’s strength.
• Once you agree the guidelines and objectives, put them on paper.
• Have an internal ambassador to promote the project within your organization. Consider someone from the leadership team.
• Motivate colleagues to participate in the employee volunteering project. The first year is the most difficult. Then your first success story will speak for itself and colleagues will spread the word and ask to participate the next year.

Challenges

• If you do not have all the necessary skills or resources around the table, you will need to seek them elsewhere. Think about potential partners with those resources. Prepare a clear and short document explaining the project, target group, (quantifiable) objectives, partners, the needs and what the project will bring to the organization.
• Each organization has different notions of time and ways of working. The availability of resources for the project will also vary. This may be a source of frustration. Keeping communications open in terms of expectations and vision is essential.
• It takes time to start a project, to agree on objectives, get organized, and build a trusting relationship. Consequently, the ‘return on investment’ in the first year may be low.
2.6 Write a common action plan

Now that you have defined a project and identified the resources you can bring to the partnership, make it concrete: write an action plan!

In this action plan describe:

- **The partnership**
- The project’s objectives and eventually the specific objectives for each partner
- **Define the impact you want to have:** for example, getting youngsters into work
- **The project timeline**
  - An objective is a specific result that a person or system aims to achieve within a time frame and with available resources.
- **Qualitative and quantitate indicators for success**
- **Concrete actions**
  - Each action you define should be related to an objective.
  - One objective can consist of more than one action.
  - When describing an action try to incorporate the following aspects: description, process, timing, responsibilities, and venue.
  - For each of the actions, we advise making a script that could be seen as an addendum of the partnership agreement. The script comprises:
    - The people involved (members, participants, organizers, volunteers)
    - Venue details (where, when you have access to the venue, how to access the venue)
    - Technical details (who is responsible for solving technical problems, what needs to be checked in advance)
    - What should be done by when, e.g., the draft version of a presentation should be finished one week before the event to allow time to finalize the presentation
    - Who is responsible for what
    - Contact details
    - The general timeline
    - The responsibilities of each of the partners.

Also think about how you will evaluate the project. This can prevent misunderstandings and help each partner get things done more efficiently internally.
Keys for success

• Ensure that volunteering tasks are varied in order to appeal to a wide range of colleagues.
• Use standardized documents for all partners.
• Agree on clear objectives.
• Start with a small initiative. After this initiative you can evaluate if the partnership is the best for both parties. It may be necessary to make some changes in the objectives of the partnership or new ideas can come up during the first activities.
• Rethink partnerships that offer limited benefits. There must be added value for all parties.
• Make sure you openly discuss everything, even the ‘hard or sensitive’ topics.
• Make sure the action is concrete enough: do all partners understand what is expected from them and when? Once your action plan is ready, it’s time to execute.
• Never lose sight of your main objective: to facilitate the professional integration of youngsters. Whatever you do, you do it ultimately for them!

Challenges

• Formulate your objectives in a way that is clear for both parties and can be evaluated.
• Don’t forget what your beneficiaries (students, employees…) need. Don’t hesitate to regularly bring their experience and expertise into the project. This will lead the project to success.
2.7 Start with a pilot

Start your partnership with a pilot to see what works and does not work, then adapt. Evaluating your project with all stakeholders (working group participants, leadership, teachers, employees, and students) is of key importance here.

Think about how to scale-up the project with your partner. Be innovative, think out of the box and invite external experts to challenge you.

**Keys for success**

- Build a trusting relationship and define a working process that will allow you to create impact.
- Keep the project manageable.
- Ask a coordinator who has sufficient time to coordinate the activities.
- Make sure that both parties can bring and receive added value from the project.
- Prepare participants well before starting the pilot.
- Remain realistic about what you want to get out of the partnership.
- Find a mentor or a partner who can help you with his/her expertise in similar projects. Look inside or outside your organization.

**Challenges**

- Getting started, translating your ‘action plan’ into real actions and activities.
- See the partner regularly and avoid one-shot projects.
- When one or both parties are not well prepared or motivated, they will quickly lose interest in the partnership.
- Different partners bring different ways of working and this can result in frustration when you don’t understand a partner’s culture. Take time to understand your differences and learn from each other.
2.8 Throughout the process, communicate

Once you have agreed on the project, and before the pilot, communicate about it internally. Making sure colleagues understand what the project is about, what is expected from them and what they can expect from the partner will ensure their buy-in. Try to give regular updates on the project. Interesting information can be shared with the entire school, company or organization via e-mail, newsletters or meetings. You can also communicate externally by informing the press or mentioning the project on your website. However, this should be done with care, as such communications could also include a call for new partners. Also communicate when you have tangible information and when you have built experience: do not communicate immediately after a pilot experience because the media could misunderstand the project and your objectives.

Keys for success

- If you communicate with clear messages at the right time, to the right audience, people will stay interested and motivated to participate.
- Communicate in a simple, interactive way and have a document prepared with more information and contact details that you can send with your communication.
- Correctly identify your target audiences for communications.
- When you communicate externally, take care to have the agreement of all the partners and use the same message.
- If possible, the school or social organization should be the source of the communication and the company should relay it.

Challenges

- It’s challenging to keep communicating during the project, from start to end.
- Don’t expect too much: have realistic expectations about what you can gain from communicating externally.
- The partnership will not benefit from too much communication.
- External communication can be interpreted as commercially motivated and this can be a drawback for companies.
Interview with Bert Verhaert from KBC Bank and Insurance

How did this project get started?

Three KBC colleagues from the recruitment department plus the head of another department with assessment experience decided to take on the challenge. Via the BECI network we were introduced to Inge Deschuyffeleer, a teacher at the Atheneum de Toverfluit (a secondary school for general, technical and vocational education) and we introduced Inge Van Brabant, coordinator of JES (a city lab that empowers young people and prepares them for education) to BECI.

One morning in March 2014, nine trainees from JES and eight students from de Toverfluit arrived at the reception of KBC headquarters. During a first session, our colleague Sven delivered a workshop about job application tips and tricks. These tips and tricks were immediately applied in the afternoon session: a simulated job application process during which participants took selection tests and received feedback from three experienced assessors.

What was the feedback from participants?

This was a pilot and both the KBC volunteers and supervisors from the partner institutions had no previous experience of such activities. Therefore, everybody was curious to see what the result would be and especially because these activities were meant to offer young people extra incentives to improve their level and expand their horizons. Jana, the instructor from JES, describes it as follows: “The students found the afternoon session most interesting, because they could work in an interactive environment. It was also nice to see how the volunteers responded to the qualities of the young people and gave them a positive and realistic picture of their future.”

Inge, from de Toverfluit, continues: “The students told me it was nice to bring what they learned in the classroom into practice, and in a realistic setting. Being allowed into the impressive KBC building was already an experience for them! I would like to thank KBC and their people for the opportunity we were given. The event’s success was also a result of good preparation and great collaboration. I sincerely hope we can repeat this project next year!”

How did KBC experience this day?

For me, this project was a learning experience. I realized we can teach these young people something and it offers us the opportunity to work with a different audience than we are used to. As such, we had to adapt our approach, but it went smoothly. At the beginning, students kept their distance but as soon as they realized that we zoomed in on their strengths and gave positive comments they became more relaxed and spontaneous. They participated well and found the experience fun and interesting.
Discover Your Talent

Interview with Véronique De Leener, director of Maks vzw on the first Engage initiative

Do you see a difference between disadvantaged youngsters and company employees?

By bringing together disadvantaged youngsters from the Anderlecht neighborhood and employees from different companies located in Brussels for one day of training and exchange, the ‘Discover Your Talent’ initiative aims to turn off all kinds of a priori assumptions. Youngsters get exposure to the ‘famous business world’ while sharpening their employability skills in order to increase their chances of success in the marketplace. Employees discover people they don’t usually meet while gaining understanding into who they really are. Although CV writing, interview techniques, competence building, presentation skills, professional attitude, and e-Tools are the topics of the different workshops, exchange and discovery are the main learning points of the day.

How do you experience collaborating with five private companies?

When Maks vzw first stepped into the Engage project, I thought that as a small non-profit organization we would learn a lot from the way private companies work. However, during the project I realized it was a win-win situation for all parties. For example, our organization functions with great flexibility: due to the lack of regular funds and working with many low-skilled employees, we are used to quickly finding solutions for new problems. This became very concrete during Discover Your Talent: lots of youngsters who had registered didn’t show up, while others who weren’t registered appeared. Based on our experience of working with youngsters, dealing with this changing situation came naturally to us, while some of the employee volunteers experienced more difficulties in handling it.

What’s in it for employee volunteers?

Employee volunteers don’t have a lot of contact with youngsters from another cultural background or young people having difficulties finding work. They also have some prejudices. Discover Your Talent is a real eye-opener for them: they experience how polite and motivated those young people are and that they really want to work. In this way, we build bridges between two worlds.

How do you evaluate such a profit/non-profit collaboration?

After five years of collaboration with Accenture, Elia, Freshfields, Nestlé, Securex and The Shift we can say that the result is very positive: the more diverse the organization’s culture, the more partners learn from each other. Our staff learns from the corporate culture of large companies and better understands the needs of employers. Employee volunteers get to see the difficult conditions in which some people are living. Ultimately we work in partnership towards a common goal: increasing the employability of young people who are disadvantaged in society.
3. Useful documents

Based on several years of Discover Your Talent (DYT) experience, we have compiled some materials that will enable you to organize a similar event in a quick and efficient way. The goal is to copy/paste the DYT event in another location with other companies while all timeline/documents/templates/tips are directly available in an ‘off the shelf’ concept.

The documents are available as templates on the DYT Google Drive:

- General info (framework agreement, timeline, contact list)
- Workshops materials (slides, scenario of the workshop)
- Evaluation forms (evaluation forms for youngsters and volunteers, certificate for the youngster)
- Logistics (volunteer list, planning, materials needed)
- Press (logo, press release)
4. Useful links

BECI - Brussels Entreprises commerce and Industry
www.beci.be

BITC - Business in the Community
www.bitc.org.uk/programmes/engage

Accenture
www.accenture.be

Accenture Skills To Succeed program
www.accenture.com/ae-en/company-skills-succeed

The Shift
www.theshift.be

DYT - Discover Your Talent
www.discoveryourtalent.be
Special thanks

BECl, The Shift and Accenture would like to thank all the organizations that are involved in the Engage project and encourage them to continue developing valuable partnerships between the private, public and non-profit sectors.

We would like to thank the Brussels Capital Region, without whose financial support this project would not have been possible, and in particular the Minister of Employment, Didier Gosuin.

We also wish to thank Ariane Molderez, expert in employee volunteering, for inspiring us to start the project, and for taking up her role as a full partner since 2011.

The Partners

Companies:

Accenture
BNP Paribas Fortis Foundation
bpost
D'Ieteren
Elia
Freshfields Bruckhaus Deringer
Geseco

Heidelberg Cement
Interparking
KBC
Nestlé
Securex
Solvay

Schools and other organizations:

Institut Notre Dame Anderlecht
Institut Saint Joseph
Institut Saint Jean et Saint Nicolas
Athénée Ernest Richard
Profo
Maks vzw
JES

Collectif Alpha
De Brusselleer
CEFA Anderlecht
Athénée Alfred Verwée
Les Anémones
Atheneum de Toverfluit
EFP Uccle

thank you!
About

**About BECI**

BECI (Brussels Enterprises Commerce & Industry) is the acronym for the organization regrouping the Brussels Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CCIB) and the Union of Enterprises in Brussels (UEB). As a fully private and independent, neutral and multilingual employer organization, BECI represents 35,000 companies with economic activities in Brussels, as well as self-employed individuals, company managers and liberal professions, and twice as many through its strategic partnership with IZEO.

Thanks to its multidisciplinary team, BECI offers a wide range of services aiming to support Brussels companies at every stage of their development. BECI also acts as spokesperson for the business industry in Brussels.

As a recognized economic and social partner, it represents and defends the interests of the Brussels companies through its active participation in numerous decision-making bodies, either private or public.

More info on [www.beci.be](http://www.beci.be).

**About Accenture**

Accenture is a global management consulting, technology services and outsourcing company, with more than 336,000 people serving clients in more than 120 countries. Combining unparalleled experience, comprehensive capabilities across all industries and business functions, and extensive research on the world’s most successful companies, Accenture collaborates with clients to help them become high-performance businesses and governments.

Through its Skills to Succeed corporate citizenship initiative, Accenture is equipping more than 3 million people around the world with the skills to get a job or build a business. The company generated net revenues of US$30.0 billion for the fiscal year ended Aug. 31, 2014.

Its home page is [www.accenture.com](http://www.accenture.com).

**About The Shift**

The Shift is the Belgian meeting point for sustainability. Our goal: realize the transition to a more sustainable society and economy together with our members and partners. Our method: Connect, Commit, Change.

We bring together more than 330 entities ranging from private companies, NGOs, academic institutions, governmental bodies and other key actors in society. Together with our members and partner organizations, we aim to develop innovative solutions to the biggest challenges faced by our planet, people and future prosperity.

The Shift links Belgium to the international sustainability agenda thanks to its alliance with UN Global Compact Network Belgium and as the national contact point for CSR Europe and the World Business Council for Sustainable Development.

More info on [www.theshift.be](http://www.theshift.be).
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