New CECP Research: Corporate Employee Engagement Programs Hit a Participation Ceiling as Return-to-Office Mandates Reshape Volunteering

Matching gifts remain nearly universal and volunteering stay accessible, but new data shows companies are reaching the same employees rather than growing engagement

NEW YORK, August 6, 2026 — Employee participation in corporate volunteering and giving programs is holding steady at roughly a quarter of the workforce, even as companies expand the number of ways employees can get involved, according to Chief Executives for Corporate Purpose®(CECP)'s Giving in Numbers® survey.

The findings show that 25% of employees on average take part in company volunteer programs and 21% take part in matching-gift programs, with participation rates having changed little in recent years despite growing program availability such as virtual volunteering. A new combined metric introduced this year reveals why: among companies that track it, employees who volunteer and employees who give are largely the same people, with over 11 percentage points of overlap between the two groups on average.

Now in its 25th year, CECP in partnership with companies, has built the largest and most comprehensive historical dataset on corporate social investment trends, drawing on participation from more than 650 multi-billion-dollar companies and representing over $519 billion in giving over the life of the survey.

"Companies keep adding new ways for employees to get involved, but the data shows they're mostly engaging the same committed group, not reaching new people," said **Kate Stobbe, Director, Corporate Insights & Research, CECP**. "Over the last several years, companies have been rebalancing their program offerings to align better with employee interests. The next frontier for corporate engagement isn't more programs; it's lowering the barriers that keep everyone else on the sidelines."

Key findings from the 2025 data include:

- Return-to-office mandates may be squeezing volunteer access. As five-day in-office requirements spread among large employers, Virtual Volunteering, Volunteer Time Off, and Flexible Scheduling all declined in a three-year matched set — with Company-Wide Days of Service dropping the most (-20.3% domestically).
- Matching gifts remain a corporate mainstay. Ninety-four percent of companies offer at least one matching-gift program, and Year-Round policies — nearly all offered at a 1:1 match ratio — account for 63% of all matching-gift dollars.
- Employee giving capacity may be tightening. Matching gifts fell from 11.2% to 9.8% of total cash contributions over a three-year matched set, driven by a 14% drop in median employee contributions — a trend that tracks with broader pressure on household finances.

- Engagement is broadening beyond volunteering and giving. Sixty percent of companies offer an Employee Assistance or Hardship Fund, with a median of $98,000 distributed and awards capped at a median of $3,000 per employee. Employee Resource Groups (94%) and sustainability programs (75%) remain widespread.
- Smaller companies see stronger participation. Across company sizes, smaller employers consistently reported higher volunteer participation rates than larger ones, pointing to the role of culture and program accessibility in driving engagement.

The research suggests that as workplace flexibility continues to shift, companies that want to grow, not just maintain engagement, will need to focus on removing barriers to participation, rather than adding new programs on top of existing ones.

Complete the survey to gain access to confidential benchmarking tables that show how your company's giving and social impact investments compare with peers of similar size and industry, helping you make more informed strategic decisions and answer executive questions with confidence. Companies over $500M in revenue can still participate and it's completely free; see the survey here and email insights@cecp.co for more information. The full report will be available in October 2026.

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More than 200 of the world's leading companies seek to improve their return on purpose through access to CECP's solutions in insights and benchmarking. With our companies, we harness the power of purpose for business, stakeholders, and society.

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