

To: Office of Personnel Management
From: Jennifer Roffle, Department of Civic Relations
Re: Community Service Leave Policy
Date: November 3, 2005

Overview

Millions of people visit the great monuments of our nation's capital each year. They admire the beauty and prestige of the memorials such as the Washington Monument, Lincoln's Memorial, and the White House. Yet the power of this nation resides not in these monuments, but its citizens. Citizens who understand that our well-being is tied to the well-being of our neighbors, community, and country. "Citizen service is one of the most important ways we demonstrate that we care for and our responsible for one another" (OPM, 1998). The Office of Personnel Management (OPM) has encouraged agencies "to make appropriate use of flexibility and other policies to permit employees to engage in volunteer activities" (OPM website, 10/05).

To support the mission of the OPM and strengthen the Department of Civic Relation's commitment to serve the community in a meaningful way, the Human Resource Department recommends a new Community Service Leave policy for its employees. This memo will provide an overview of the proposed policy including: definitions, background, legal requirements/limitations, implementation considerations, potential objections, benefits of the policy, as well as the actual policy DCR would like to implement within the next 120 days if approved by the Office of Personnel Management.

Definitions

Community Service is a broad term that can be defined as any service volunteered by individuals or an organization to benefit a community (American Heritage Dictionary 4th Edition, 2000) The Department of Civic Responsibility (DCR)

defines community service as services provided for schools, emergency and disaster situations, and community service organizations.

*Note: (For more specifics on the definition of community service and what qualifies as school assistance, disaster and disaster situations and community organizations see the **attached DCR's Community Service Policy Proposal for 2006**)*

Background

In a memo dated 1998 *Strengthening our Commitment to Service*, President Clinton directed Federal agencies to adopt practices that would increase opportunities for employees to participate in service. Clinton placed the Office of Personnel Management in charge of approving these programs. OPM reported to the President that most of the Departments and agencies responded with the use of “alternative work schedules (34 agencies), credit hour programs (13 agencies), and other scheduling flexibilities (24 agencies)” to meet the President’s mission (OPM report 1998, website). Most agencies reported that “under limited circumstances they granted excused absences for community service,” but very few agencies granted employees paid time off to volunteer (OPM report 1998, website).

Legal Requirements/Limitations

The Office of Personnel Management request that agencies review any applicable regulations, policies, or collective bargaining agreements before submitting any proposals. OPM also stipulates that all proposals must “give due considerations to the effect of the employee’s absence or change in duty schedule on work operations and productivity” (OPM website, 10/29/05).

Review of Public Law 103-82 ***National and Community Service Trust Act*** states the primary purpose of the act is to “meet the unmet human, educational, environmental, and public safety needs of the United States” (Public Law 103-82, 108th Congress, 2nd Session 9/21/93). DCR would like to support this public law with a new

human resource policy *Community Service Leave* that would allow employees paid time off to volunteer in their communities.

Also, review of the State of California law supports DCR's philosophy that society needs more participation by its citizens to address community needs. California's Executive Order W – 132-96 declares:

There is nothing better for keeping kids out of trouble than the love and active concern of both the child's mother and father. But in the absence of both parents, society-all of us-must see to it that kids receive love, and discipline, the nurturing and guidance that they need to become healthy, productive adults. (Executive Order W-132-96).

Implementation Considerations

To avoid employees' absence during community service leaves causing unnecessary changes in the work operations and productivity; DCR will enact strict guidelines for the implementation of Community Service Leave.

1. Employees must receive approval from their supervisors prior to using community service leave. A maximum of 36 hours of Community Leave will be made available per calendar year.
2. Community Service Leave request must be reviewed by Human Resources to make sure they adhere to all DCR polices, collective bargaining agreements, and OPM regulations.
3. Community Service Leave request will be denied if it the will significantly impact DCR's operations, productivity, or if there are budgetary limitations.

Potential Objections

OPM reported that many agencies felt "paying an employee for community services raises the question of whether such an activity is truly a "volunteer" activity" (OPM website, 10/05/05). The idea that giving an employee paid time off to participate in a community service is not truly a "volunteer" activity is outdated and counterproductive to DCR's mission to serve the community in a meaningful way. "Since Katrina struck, more than 12, 300 national service volunteers have contributed to the

hurricane relief and recovery effort in the Gulf Coast” (USA Freedom website, 10/20/05). As the country recovers from the devastation of Katrina the consensus that has emerged is that we need a new national strategy to deal with natural disasters. No longer can Americans operate on the assumption that “it can’t happen here” and more importantly government alone can’t solve these disasters. There has never been a better or more necessary time for DCR to take a leadership role in their human resource policies and provide employees with a Community Service Leave benefit that would allow employees to get paid time off to volunteer during times of disasters such as Katrina. Already states such as North Carolina, Virginia, and Indiana grant employees paid time off for community service. Businesses such as Walt Disney, MBNA, and Citigroup also offer paid time off for employees to engage in community service activities.

Benefits of Community Service Policy

Community Service has benefits for individual employees, the community, and the agency itself. The proposed Community Service Leave policy for DCR will improve employee’s self-esteem, and leadership skills. Community Service Leave will help alleviate community problems. Lastly, a Community Service Leave policy supports DCR’s mission of serving the community in a meaningful way.

Individual Employees Benefits

Paid community service leave is attractive benefit packages to employees because they appreciate the extra time they receive out of a busy work schedule to participate in community service. According to the Bureau of Labor statistics, volunteerism is on the rise with more than 64.5 million Americans volunteers in 2004, which is increase of more than 5 million since last year (USA Freedom Corps, website). Also, employees who are parents will be able to use Community Service Leave to volunteer at their child’s school. More importantly, community service leave is an important policy because when

people volunteer “they are making new connections, building their own sense of community, learning new skills, fostering heightened self-esteem, and cultivating leadership capacities” (USA Freedom Corp, website).

Community Benefits

DCR’s Community Service Leave proposal allows employees paid time off to volunteer in schools, emergency and disaster situations, and community service organizations. “Research clearly shows that children's academic performance is higher at schools that have high parental involvement” (CQ Researcher, 1995). Allowing employees community service leave for disaster and emergency situations is important because the tragic events of September 11 and Katrina demonstrated the importance of voluntarism as evident by “countless acts of service, sacrifice, and generosity” of the American people (USA Freedom Corp website, 10/05). Lastly, a Community Service Leave would allow employees to participate in community organizations such as the Big Brother/Big Sister program. The state of California studied the Brother/Big Sister programs and found “children who are mentored were less likely to initiate drug and alcohol use, to hit someone, skip school, and were more likely to show academic gains” (State of California, Executive Order W-132-96, 1998).

Conclusion

America was founded on the principle civic responsibility and volunteerism. The framers of Constitution understood that active, well-informed citizens were necessary for the preservation of democracy As a federal agency DCR has a responsibility to set an example to the nation that we are committed to principle of civic responsibility and volunteerism. The commitment to these principles should be reflected in our human resource policy. A Community Service Leave policy allows employees paid time off to volunteer in schools, during disasters and emergency situations, and help community organizations that serve the homeless, elderly, and youth.

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