

CORPORATE ACTION: SKILLS-BASED VOLUNTEERING IN STEM

Why Skills-based Volunteering?

Change the Equation members are boosting STEM literacy among K–12 students and developing the STEM talent needed for the U.S. workforce by contributing hundreds of millions of dollars to STEM education. To expand this investment, many companies strongly encourage STEM employees to volunteer. Research indicates that *skills-based volunteerism* is an excellent way for STEM professionals to inspire and engage students in STEM learning.

WHAT IS SKILLS-BASED VOLUNTEERISM?

Skills-based volunteerism leverages the skills, talent, experiences, passion, and education of STEM professionals and matches them to the learning needs of students. For example, a software engineer might help students learn to code or create an app, or find out about growing career fields, such as cybersecurity or nanotechnology. Skills-based volunteerism also encompasses many work-based learning opportunities, such as classroom visits, company tours, career fairs, informational and mock interviews, and internships.

WHY SKILLS-BASED VOLUNTEERISM IN STEM?

Sharing STEM skills and expertise makes the biggest difference to students. The vast majority of U.S. young people—even those who are interested in STEM—say they are discouraged from pursuing STEM careers because they don't know any STEM professionals or understand what they do.¹

Change the Equation is addressing this critical challenge by helping to seed a skills-based volunteering network, matching the volunteer needs of K–12 schools and leading STEM programs to the skills of corporate employees across the nation.

BENEFITS TO COMPANIES

- **A stronger STEM pipeline.** STEM skills are in high demand, but too many students do not elect STEM career pathways. Sparking students' interest in STEM careers early, and preparing them to succeed in college and careers, will strengthen the STEM workforce of tomorrow.
- **A bold approach to talent development.** Employee mentoring and work-based learning experiences can help develop students' talent, introduce them to the world of work and corporate cultures, and identify promising recruits.
- **Enhanced reputation.** Employee volunteerism can build corporate brand awareness and convey a positive image in communities. It can also "boost loyalty and trust among customers [in those communities] which in turn can have direct impact on the bottom line."²
- **Improved employee recruitment, retention, and skills.** Companies that support skills-based volunteerism have an advantage in recruiting and retaining employees in a tight labor market. Prospective employees expect companies to offer these opportunities—and current employees value the convenience of giving back to their communities with employer support as well. Plus, employees can gain new competencies, such as leadership, collaboration, and mentoring skills, when they work as company ambassadors with teachers and students.

BENEFITS TO EMPLOYEES

- **More positive work environment.** Employees take pride in working for companies that support STEM volunteerism. They enjoy the chance to contribute their own knowledge and skills and turn students on to the wonders of STEM. These interactions energize employees and make them more committed to their work.
- **Leadership development.** Skills-based volunteerism provides opportunities for employees to grow and develop as leaders with experiences they might not have in the workplace.

BENEFITS TO STUDENTS

- **Support for STEM learning.** STEM professionals help bridge the gap between classroom learning and practical application of STEM know-how in the workplace. Through true-to-life experiences, such as hands-on activities and project-based learning, students discover how STEM learning in school can translate into a STEM career.
- **Career pathways.** STEM professionals can help students channel their interest in STEM into a pathway that will prepare them for a STEM career—and develop a plan to be successful in a particular area of STEM.
- **Professional identity.** STEM professionals put a face on STEM careers—and help them seem accessible and attainable. This is particularly important for underrepresented groups in STEM fields, such as girls and students of color, for whom role models exemplify that there is a place for them in the STEM workforce.

Notes

¹ Lemelson-MIT Invention Index, 2009.

² Case Foundation, *Can Corporate Volunteering Support the Bottom Line*, (Washington, D.C., 2005).

Change the Equation Can Help Your Company Get Involved

Change the Equation can help your company match employees with schools in your community that are seeking skilled volunteers. Simply designate one person to coordinate your employees' involvement. Change the Equation will connect your company coordinator with a school volunteer coordinator in your community to get you started.