

THE BUSINESS VIEW – *James Temple*

## The pro-bono paradox: re-thinking how we share experiences

Over the past few months, I've been talking to a lot of people about best approaches to corporate and community relations. To me, it's about going beyond traditional transactional philanthropy to develop a shared language, reduce power dynamics and focus on values versus investments. To get there, we need to better understand how each of us can play a role in strengthening the effectiveness of the nonprofit sector.

With this in mind, I'd like to apply these principles to a common aspect of philanthropy: pro-bono work. Pro-bono work is absolutely a good thing and can create great benefits for both the nonprofit and the corporation involved. At the same time, though, could we make approaches to pro-bono work better?

In my opinion, the answer is a definite yes. We need to look at the motivations behind this work, and how the perception of power dynamics between the business and charity can often create only short-term fixes. In some cases, we even run the risk of causing long-term challenges for nonprofits by misunderstanding their needs.

**Send teachers, not superheroes**

Business has often taken on a superhero mentality when making contributions to nonprofit organizations. With pro-bono work, there continues to be an undertone of business wanting to "rescue" a nonprofit that is seen as broken.

More importantly, an increasing number of businesses are jumping on the pro-bono wagon and moving beyond what was originally intended by the professional work being provided. Whereas legal and accounting work were once provided to augment unaffordable skills, many businesses now do pro-bono work in logistics, strategic plan-

ning, communications or marketing – areas that might better be positioned as longer-term partnerships to help foster a "teach, don't tell" environment.

Many pro-bono projects propose solutions that cannot be properly implemented by the nonprofit due to skill gaps. The tell-tale story of consultants doing work within a charity, only to find their dusty, bound report and recommendations sitting on the executive director's shelf a year later, reinforces this point.

***"Many pro-bono projects propose solutions that cannot be properly implemented by the nonprofit..."***

That's why fundraisers and community investment professionals must keep a laser focus on their organization's long-term strategies and ask each other how pro-bono work augments skills, rather than replacing them altogether.

**Re-creating our pro-bono picture**

Many professionals don't want to volunteer in the same capacity as their day jobs. In **Volunteer Canada's** recent study *Bridging the Gap*, a survey of employer-supported volunteers indicated that they were motivated by experiences working with charities that helped them develop new skills, and some indicated they did not want to volunteer doing the same job as they do for work.

**New model for pro-bono**

At **PwC**, we've adopted a new lens for pro-bono work. Going beyond discounted fees or offering professional services, we've developed a new volunteer-based experience called the Not-for-Profit Apprentice Program. Employees from across the company with all levels of experience team up and brainstorm options to help leadership teams at nonprofits address critical challenges.

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**About James Temple**

**James Temple** is the director of corporate responsibility for **PricewaterhouseCoopers Canada** and director of the **PricewaterhouseCoopers Canada Foundation**. He oversees a team responsible for integrating good social, environmental and economic values into PwC's decision-making processes.

James is a featured presenter at international conferences, speaking on the value of developing strong corporate-community partnerships. He co-chairs the **Association of Corporate Grantmakers** and sits on the Advisory Board for the Institute at Havergal College.

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