



THE PRO BONO SWEET SPOT

A Framework for Strategic Corporate Pro Bono Program Design

Corporate pro bono service is on the rise. Pro bono is the fastest-growing type of volunteer program globally. As of 2016, more than half of all companies engaged their employees in pro bono service programs.¹

Here at Taproot, we are excited to see such rapid adoption amongst some of the largest and most influential companies in the world. This progress means that more and more nonprofits are getting the capacity-building support that they need to confront challenges in areas like marketing, strategy, HR, and IT. All this makes for stronger social sector organizations that are better equipped to face the most pressing issues of our time.

Now that pro bono is becoming a more common practice among companies, Taproot sees an opportunity to share

our strategic approach to pro bono program design with the field. Since many companies have spent the last few years getting their pro bono initiatives off the ground, they are now able to step back, reflect on what they've accomplished, and explore what's next. They are in a position to ask themselves: How can we be more strategic about our approach to pro bono service programming? How can we refine our pro bono service programs or create new ones to achieve the highest level of impact? A strategic approach to program design will help us take the field to the next level – and will ultimately do more good for the social sector.

INTRODUCING THE PRO BONO SWEET SPOT

We've learned a lot over the years about what makes a corporate pro bono program successful, and one thing has been proven true time and again: the most impactful programs are those that are uniquely tailored to fit a given company. With this in mind, we've developed a handy framework for helping companies hone in on their own unique opportunities to make an impact in the social sector through pro bono service.

The Pro Bono Sweet Spot is a framework that recognizes that the corporate sector is rich with diversity across a variety of characteristics, such as organizational culture,

skills and expertise, attitudes towards volunteering, and more. Long story short, each company is unique, and therefore needs a tailor-made pro bono program in order to maximize its distinct opportunity for impact.

The Pro Bono Sweet Spot framework asks companies to consider four key factors – unique at each company – that will affect their programs' impact. A company's pro bono sweet spot is the area where the social impact they want to have, their available skills and expertise, the business objectives that matter most to them, and any contextual information or constraints overlap.

THE PRO BONO SWEET SPOT: A FRAMEWORK FOR STRATEGIC CORPORATE PRO BONO PROGRAM DESIGN

What are the social sector needs that your company wants to address?

Identify a manageable, measureable social impact outcome that pro bono service is well-suited to support.

1

Which skills and expertise are available at your company?

Consider which skills and expertise your company has to offer and which of those skills might add the most value to the social sector need your company would like to address.

2

CONTEXT & CONSTRAINTS

What are the potential constraints at your company that will need to be considered during program design?

Keep in mind any context or constraints that might affect the design of your program.

4

SOCIAL SECTOR NEED

SKILLS & EXPERTISE

Which business objectives might pro bono service help your company achieve?

Align your pro bono program with your company's strategic priorities to ensure there is internal support.

3

BUSINESS OBJECTIVES



THE POWER OF THE PRO BONO SWEET SPOT

Without a framework for program design, it can be tough for companies to identify their sweet spot. When companies are thinking about how to start a pro bono

program or take their existing program to the next level, there are a few barriers that can get in the way, outlined in the chart below.

THE BARRIER

WHY IT'S PROBLEMATIC

HOW THE SWEET SPOT FRAMEWORK CAN HELP

We lead with constraints.

Sometimes companies start the program design process by selecting a program model first, like a one-day program, or by designing around a specific constraint, such as engaging 100 people. This approach can box us in, limiting our design options without considering the other variables that we should also be designing around.

The Sweet Spot framework helps ensure we're not building a program that is designed solely around our constraints. It enables companies to evaluate a variety of design objectives and factors, which provides a more comprehensive picture of what a program's design should be.

We don't set realistic impact goals.

Sometimes companies think big – which is a good thing! But sometimes when designing a pro bono program, they think too big. For example, if a company's goal for a pro bono program is to eradicate homelessness, they might be disappointed to see that their pro bono program isn't having a measurable impact on the problem.

The Sweet Spot framework encourages companies to set realistic expectations for what pro bono can achieve from a social impact perspective. That means setting attainable and measurable social impact goals when designing a program so we can track progress and celebrate wins.

We avoid taking risks.

For many companies, engaging employees in pro bono service is still new. When we're trying something new, it's tempting to default to program models that have been done before to help mitigate risk. Although it is important to learn from what other companies have done, if companies are averse to trying new models of delivering pro bono, they miss out on the opportunity to build programs that optimize what makes them unique. They don't get the chance to try new things, become more innovative, and drive progress.

The Sweet Spot framework encourages companies to think about their own unique objectives and inputs to help determine how those might combine to inform a program approach that is uniquely their own. The social sector needs each company to share their unique value. Making a diversity of professional expertise available, and a myriad of ways to access that expertise, will help ensure that corporate pro bono is addressing the wide variety of capacity challenges that social sector organizations face.

Taproot wants to empower companies to break down these barriers, and the Pro Bono Sweet Spot framework helps us do just that. With the Sweet Spot, we make sure that companies develop strategies for pro bono programming that are the best fit for them – that their approach is not too narrow, nor too broad, that they have considered the tradeoffs relevant to their unique goals

and needs, and that they feel empowered to iterate upon proven pro bono models. The Pro Bono Sweet Spot framework allows us to keep all these factors in mind while simultaneously achieving the highest level of impact for social sector organizations. It's all about finding the distinct approach that maximizes the strengths of a given company.

THE PRO BONO SWEET SPOT IN ACTION

The Pro Bono Sweet Spot is beneficial for companies of all shapes and sizes. At Taproot, we apply the Sweet Spot framework with those who have never tried pro bono before, as well as with others that have mature initiatives already. We use it with companies that are interested in designing discrete programs, as well as with ones that want to implement a full portfolio of pro bono initiatives.

The following example walks through one instance of utilizing the Pro Bono Sweet Spot with Monsanto, a multinational modern agriculture company based in Missouri. To help Monsanto maximize their impact potential, we knew we needed to help them identify their pro bono sweet spot. In the image below, we've shared some of Monsanto's key design considerations.

1 What are the social sector needs that your company wants to address?

Monsanto's social impact goal is for everyone around the world to have access to a balanced plate. In order to set realistic objectives for what their pro bono initiative could achieve, we looked at the food value chain – the journey that food takes from farm to fork – and identified the major gaps that prevent people from having access to a balanced plate. Focusing on gaps in the value chain, like distribution challenges, helped us set achievable social impact goals.

2 Which skills and expertise are available at your company?

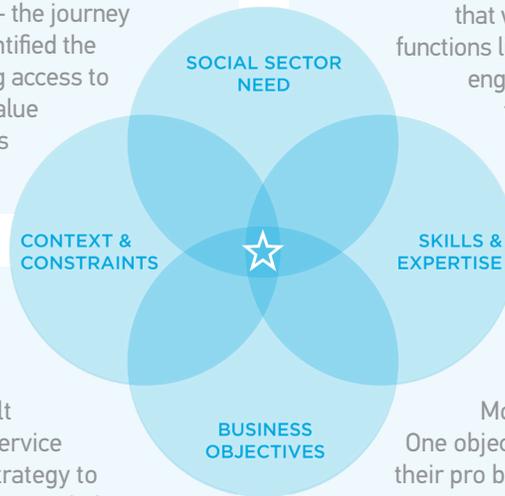
As a major multinational company, Monsanto is rich with talent across a variety of functional areas. We worked with Monsanto to identify which talent could have the most impact to address the gaps we identified in the food value chain. We recognized that what set Monsanto apart were their experts in functions like supply chain, biochemistry, seed breeding, engineering, and agronomy. We knew we wanted to start by making those skills available to the social sector through pro bono.

3 What are the potential constraints at your company that will need to be considered during program design?

Monsanto knew that the program they built would need to be replicable, as pro bono service would be an integral part of their overall strategy to support food and nutrition security. We also needed to keep in mind the time employees had to dedicate to a pro bono program and ensure that participants' managers were bought-in.

4 Which business objectives might pro bono service help your company achieve?

Monsanto had a variety of business objectives. One objective they wanted to focus on was leveraging their pro bono initiative as a way to build key skills and competencies among Monsanto participants.



Given the design considerations shown above, Taproot and Monsanto partnered to design a three-month pro bono program that engaged specialized Monsanto talent and nonprofit organizations focused on food and nutrition security. We worked closely with Monsanto's HR team to identify the program's talent development objectives and to select the right employees to participate. With HR's support, we determined that three months is a manageable time commitment for employees, while also being enough time to foster key competencies and skill development which was critical to HR. We also made

sure that managers were informed and engaged and that the program expectations were clear.

The nonprofits we invited to participate had challenges that could be addressed by Monsanto's unique areas of expertise. One participating nonprofit, for example, was an organization focused on immigrant transition to the U.S. that was building a greenhouse so they could grow fresh produce off-season. The organization worked with a Monsanto team of subject matter experts to understand how to build and manage a greenhouse effectively

to ensure fresh produce was accessible to their constituents during the winter months. The program model we developed was built to be highly replicable so that Monsanto can continue to do pro bono where they have employee presence all over the world.

The impact of Monsanto's pro bono program was exceptional. The participating nonprofits stated that they met their goals for the program, and felt confident that what they received from the program would address their

need. On the employee side, all participants felt that the program met or exceeded their expectations, and that it was a valuable investment of their time.

The Monsanto example shows us how one company defined and narrowed their social impact objectives, recognized how their talent could help address some key challenges, and built a pro bono program that met their business needs.²

DRIVING THE FIELD FORWARD

Now is an exciting moment for the field of corporate pro bono. As more and more leading companies around the world adopt the pro bono ethic, more and more social good organizations are receiving the capacity-building support they need. Ultimately, this thriving pro bono marketplace is helping to bring about a more empowered social sector.

As corporate pro bono providers, we need to ensure our pro bono service offerings are maximized to make the most impact. The Pro Bono Sweet Spot is a tool that allows us to do just that. At the company level, it helps us

to map our unique objectives, expertise, and constraints, identify where that company is uniquely positioned to add value, and develop a tactical approach to developing or improving pro bono programs.

More broadly, though, this approach has the power to take corporate pro bono to the next level. By using the Pro Bono Sweet Spot framework across the field, we can develop more strategic, higher-impact programs that ultimately add the greatest value to the social sector – and we at Taproot think that's pretty great.

This approach has the power to take corporate pro bono to the next level.

If you want to learn more about the Pro Bono Sweet Spot framework and how to bring it to life at your company, reach out to advisory@taprootfoundation.org for more information.

²Data sourced from post-program surveys.



Taproot Foundation, a national nonprofit, connects nonprofits and social change organizations with skilled volunteers through pro bono service. Taproot is creating a world where organizations dedicated to social change have full access—through pro bono service—to the marketing, strategy, HR, and IT resources they need to be most effective. Since 2001, our Advisory Services practice has partnered with over 85 leading companies across the globe to develop best-in-class, customized, in-house pro bono initiatives. For more information, contact advisory@taprootfoundation.org

www.taprootfoundation.org