

Eight considerations when planning a Mandela Day programme

Mandela Day can be more than just one day, if organisations plan the short-term programme for maximum impact.

Monash South Africa's head of community engagement, Bronwyn Dugtig, says, "We should not underestimate the value of a short-term programme that leads to broader sustainable engagement.

"Working at Monash South Africa's campus, with both students and staff I have seen the impact short term projects such as Mandela Day can have on the individual. Many of our students and staff start off volunteering on a single community day and this often leads to longer term volunteering in one of our many sustainable community programmes."



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Having worked in community engagement for over six years, Dugtig strongly believes volunteering develops leadership and active citizens; their strongest leaders are often those who volunteer in social change projects. "Many of the university's undergraduate and postgraduate students have chosen career paths that work to tackle critical issues in Africa, such as education, health and HIV Aids, environmental issues and civic engagement.

"However, volunteering is not just for the youth, seeking a community-focused career path. Mandela Day provides an opportunity for companies to start to engage in a Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programme and promote active citizenship among their employees. Corporate engagement on the day often surpasses the stipulated 67 minutes, growing into a longer-term project, encouraging employee retention as many employees look to work for corporates with a conscious.

Eight tips for a successful programme

There are eight important considerations when planning a Mandela Day programme by corporates or individuals.

1. Partner with an experienced, existing organisation - When planning a project, one should look to partner with an existing organisation. This can ensure that your impact and effort will last for more than just one day. Talk to a number of organisations to ascertain some of the areas they struggle with.
2. Build a relationship of trust with the organisation – Develop a long term relationship with the community organisation or NGO so that you can partner with them on an ongoing basis and build a relationship of trust. A relationship of trust will assist your partner to be open with you about their needs; where they would like your help and where they do not require help.
3. Ask “how can we help?” – Do not automatically assume you know the answers and can provide solutions. You need to listen closely to a community organisation to engage in a healthy partnership with them.
4. Develop your programme together with your community partner – Develop the programme and activities for the day together, do not come up with your Mandela Day from the point of view of your office.
5. Empower and create ownership in the process – It is very important to remember that you are there to assist the community partner and that the staff and the beneficiaries of the programme come first. Listening and collaborating creates a sense of ownership and empowerment that will keep the momentum going after you return to your usual working day.
6. Be aware of images used in social media – Be aware of pictures you use on social media, particularly pictures that make beneficiaries look vulnerable. When you post a picture, ask yourself the question, “Am I posting this picture because it makes me look good or am I posting it because it makes the other people in the picture look good?” Remember that you need permission from all people in a picture before you can use it to further your corporate image, be respectful of a person's rights to privacy. You can very easily disempower someone by the images you post.
7. Prepare and orientate your volunteers – Communicate clearly with your staff members as to where they are going and what you want them to achieve. Well-meaning volunteers can create false promises and insincere commitments. Develop guidelines with your community partner as to how your employees should conduct themselves on the day. Examples of such guidelines could be do not hand out money haphazardly; if you see a serious need or issue, speak to the organisation and use the correct channels for assistance; do not make empty promises on the day, such as promising to collect donations or return to visit a child. If volunteers would like to continue to engage further, they should first speak to their CSR manager or community organisation. Remind your employees that they are visitors in a community and should be respectful. If you have partnered with an organisation that works with children make sure you have all volunteers sign a child protection policy to understand their risks and responsibilities. You do not want to put children or your employees at risk because you overlooked this step.
8. Have fun and enjoy the experience – Lastly, remember to have fun! If you follow the above guidelines, you are well on your way to starting a great partnership and celebrating the life and legacy of President Nelson Mandela.

“Nelson Mandela lived an extraordinary life, giving 67 years of his life fighting for the rights of humanity. This legacy needs to be passed down to future generations and what better way to do that than to be active citizens?” concludes Dugtig.

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