

Sample Philanthropic Leave Policy

Contributed by the Knowledge Resources staff

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SUMMARY

The AIA National component started a philanthropic leave program for staff members in March 2007. The benefit is designed to encourage staff to be active members of the community without penalty for time off from work. Since the program's inception, 48 of 210 employees have participated.

THE AIA'S PROGRAM

Philanthropic leave is designed to allow staff time off to work voluntarily on sponsored projects that benefit the community at large. Eligible projects are usually sponsored by charitable, education, scientific, or community service organizations, such as Habitat for Humanity, Christmas in April, and local food banks; projects in support of local schools; and so on. Philanthropic leave is not applicable to time off for participation in rallies, marches, or other events with a political agenda.

Staff members are eligible for up to two days per calendar year for this purpose. Employees may take this time in full- or half-day increments of no less than four hours.

To qualify for philanthropic leave, staff members need to:

- Hold a regular full-time position,
- Have satisfactorily completed a six-month probationary period, and
- Maintain at least a "fully meets expectations" performance record.

The application form must be filled out prior to the philanthropic event and must be approved by the requester's immediate supervisor and department head.

ADAPTING THE PROGRAM FOR AN ARCHITECTURE FIRM

To create a similar program for an architecture firm, first, determine its intent. Such programs can be used as a team-building exercise, as a community relations activity, or as a distinctive human resources benefit.

The firm may or may not choose to focus the program on activities related to the architecture, design, and construction industries. If this focus is chosen, though, consider existing programs like the [ACE Mentoring Program](#), [Habitat for Humanity](#)[®], and the Washington Architectural Foundation's [Architecture in the Schools](#).

If a number of staff members participate in an event together, it may be worthwhile to have them take photographs and write a brief, one- to three-paragraph synopsis of the activity. The images and summary could be used on the firm's Web site or in marketing material.

Implementation

To incorporate a philanthropic leave policy, mind the following steps:

1. Determine the intent of the program.
2. Establish an advocate or program director.
3. Create policy guidelines.
4. Promote the program to staff.
5. Review the program annually.

Also, because time away from the office reduces billable hours, it is important to determine how much time it is financially feasible to donate and how many days notice should be required before staff members participate in an event.

RESOURCES

For More Information on This Topic

See also "Human Resources Management" by Debra Fiori, in *The Architect's Handbook of Professional Practice*, 14th edition, Chapter 7, page 244. *The Handbook* can be ordered from the AIA Bookstore by calling 800-242-3837 (option 4) or by sending an e-mail to bookstore@aia.org.



More Best Practices

The following AIA Best Practices provide additional information related to this topic:

- 09.01.13 A Sample Compressed Workweek Benefit Program
- 09.03.36 NBBJ: Success in Leadership Development
- 09.01.10 Telecommuting Considerations

Feedback

The AIA welcomes member feedback on Best Practice articles. To provide feedback on this article, please contact bestpractices@aia.org.

Key Terms

- Practice
- Personnel management
- Benefits
- Philanthropy