



Making Corporate Volunteering Work for Your Mission

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Corporate volunteering (CV)—when companies encourage their employees to volunteer their time or expertise with nonprofit organizations—has become a popular form of cross-sector collaboration.

This study explores forms of nonprofit business collaboration from a *nonprofit perspective*: Why do nonprofits engage in CV? How do they interpret and make sense of corporate volunteering? How do these interpretations influence the types and dynamics of collaborations they form with companies?

The authors highlight that, depending on the frame used, different perceptions of the distribution of power between the nonprofit and the business partner exist, addressing the crucial role of how nonprofit organizations position themselves in such partnerships.

[#corporatevolunteering](#) [#nonprofitbusinesscollaboration](#) [#sensemaking](#)
[#powerdynamics](#) [#nonprofitagency](#)

Background

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Context



- Prior studies have largely focused on how companies benefit (e.g., in reputation, employee engagement) and often assumed that collaboration depth and integration always produce mutual benefit. This paper challenges this assumption, arguing that:
 - From the nonprofit perspective, more integrated is not always better.
 - Nonprofits are not passive recipients of corporate offers; they actively construct meaning and strategy through their own cognitive frames. This repositions **nonprofits as sensemakers and strategists** in corporate volunteering relationships.
- Using the theoretical lenses of **sensemaking** and **cognitive frames**, the authors analysed semi structured interviews conducted with persons responsible for CV from 15 Austrian nonprofits. They examined how nonprofits perceive the purpose, value, and power dynamics in these collaborations—and how these perceptions shape the kind of partnerships that emerge.

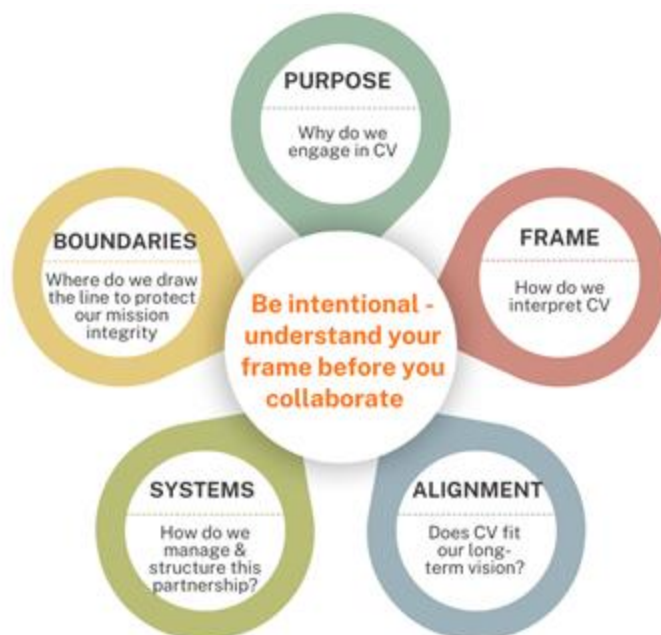
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Take aways & Learnings



- Nonprofits interpret corporate volunteering (CV) in three main ways - each shaping how they partner:
 - **Market-based frame:** CV is seen as a professional “service.” Nonprofits act as providers offering structured volunteering products, prioritizing control, clear boundaries, and professionalism.
 - **Resource-dependent frame:** CV is viewed as a source of much-needed support. Nonprofits accept most offers, often adapting to corporate needs in hopes of long-term benefits.
 - **Idealistic frame:** CV is seen as a shared mission for societal change. Partnerships are trust-based, equal, and focused on learning and long-term impact.
- **Power and control shape outcomes:** Perceived—not actual—power balance determines how nonprofits act. Those with clear missions and professional systems retain more agency.
- **Deep collaboration isn’t always better:** Some nonprofits prefer limited, transactional partnerships to protect autonomy and mission integrity.
- **Strategy and self-awareness matter:** A nonprofit’s internal framing—scarcity, professionalism, or shared purpose—defines whether CV feels empowering or exploitative.



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