CSR 2.0: India Inc moves to virtual volunteering

Mamtha Asokan | TNN | Jun 27, 2020, 04:00 IST

Chennai: With social distancing becoming the new norm, corporates and institutions move towards virtual volunteering CSR activities.

IBM India has seen a rise in employee contribution as coaches and mentors on the IBM digital platforms.

“We have seen an increase of over 60% additional IBMers volunteering their time and efforts to these education and skilling initiatives, in the last three months. With most schools shifting to online schools, we are actively involved in creating audio books for the blind in 4 languages, English, Hindi, Kannada and Tamil,” said its CSR head Manoj Balachandran.

Punjab-based educational institution Lovely Professional University plans to engage its students towards virtual volunteering programs, like capacity building activities for NGOs, SHGs in slums and villages through digital mode. Generating awareness through online workshops on social entrepreneurship, talk shows, webinars, contributing through content creation for social media platforms, besides conducting online competitions (on Yoga Day) in villages.
Its head of division of student welfare Sorabh Lakhanpal said, “Our students will volunteer to produce audio books for NGOs like Saksham which caters to the blind community. Students will also provide career counselling to school dropouts and people in rehabilitation centres in villages. Going forward, students will develop a mobile application (technology solution), through which counselling will be given on financial, social issues in real time.”

Besides restrictions placed on physical volunteering, lack of budget for CSR projects has also pushed companies to promote employee engagement.

Grant-making organization which connects donors and credible NGOs — EdelGive Foundation — said the biggest challenge is raising the second round of funding for NGOs. Its COO Naghma Mulla said, “We have to accept the reality of limited funding from large corporates and must find ways to operate around it. Large donations came till May, while now we worry about donors’ capacity to allocate funds for the rest of the year.”

Deloitte India has seen employee engagement triple post lockdown, as they move from physical to virtual volunteering. NC Hegde, national leader, people and culture, Deloitte India said, “Participation from employees has increased from 45-50 employees per month to 200 employees during lockdown. Earlier, employees physically visited NGOs to mentor and share their skillsets, while now have logged in over 500 hours in designing software solutions and providing consultations from homes.”

Freshworks employees created a Covid Telemedicine Helpline to empower the state helplines which saw a large volume of calls. This system helped connect volunteer doctors (2800+ signed up) sitting in their houses to screen patients via phone for Covid symptoms. “The traffic on helpline numbers shot up with more Covid-19 cases. This project was done on a pro-bono basis by a 15-membered team who clocked 18 hours a day and were live in three days,” said Himanshu Singh, head of India pre-sales, Freshworks.