



BEING THE CHANGE – VOLUNTEERING FROM A DISTANCE

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Tata employees and companies are bound together by a set of distinctive Tata values and an ethos of 'giving back' to society. Volunteering is one of the mechanisms that enables this – it channels the group's most valuable asset, its 700,000 plus strong workforce from 100 countries, to go 'beyond business' and contribute to the social advancement of communities by 'rolling up our sleeves and being the change that we wish to see in this world'.

Tata Engage, the group's volunteering program, was established in 2014 with the mission to encourage Tata volunteers (including family members and retirees) around the globe to engage with the community by contributing time and skills.

It has grown in terms of volunteer participation and volunteering hours, involving scores of volunteers to clock a million hours since its inception. The intent was to continue the journey with the same vigour in 2020. However, COVID-19 halted ongoing volunteering initiatives and required changes in strategy to curate meaningful opportunities for employees and to support communities in need.

ProEngage, the group's skill-based volunteering program, pairs volunteers – for extended periods and on their personal time – with NGOs, enabling them to work in teams and use their skills and knowledge to address identified problems. ProEngage already has a rich track record of success in benefiting NGOs through financial modeling, human resource management, marketing, coding, MIS building and strategy formulating. We launched an online edition of ProEngage on 15th June 2020. The team reached out to organizations who could be supported through capacity and capability building and sourced over 450 virtual projects from 160+ partner organizations across the globe. When volunteer recruitment began, we received an overwhelming response of 1800+ applications. After a careful selection





process and an e-orientation program, 900 volunteers started working on 410 projects with 120 partner organizations in July. The projects include creating performance management systems, documenting best practices, mentoring young students, conducting social media marketing, et al, encompassing almost every skill set and interest area.

The second initiative, Tata Volunteering Week (TVW), was launched on 5th September 2020 – the International Day of Charity. TVW is organized biannually as a series of half-day volunteering opportunities curated by Tata companies to introduce their employees to volunteering and to enable them to share the experience with family members and colleagues from across the group. Usually, this entails volunteers to go out and spend time in communities. This edition was revised with a set of guidelines, toolkits and an idea bank to get Tata companies started under the constraints of the pandemic. The enthusiasm of our Volunteer Champions in participating companies enabled the group to conduct 2,500+ activities, clock over 100,000 hours, involve 35,000 volunteers, and reach over 200,000 beneficiaries during TVW.

Here are a few of our companies' activities:

1000 Voices: Tata Communications took up the challenge of recording 1000 inspirational stories and poems which were then shared with the visually challenged for their enjoyment and learning. The volunteers were creative with voice modulations while taking help from family members to depict different voices.

Hands-On Banking: Tata Chemicals volunteers were oriented to create aids in the form of concept notes, guides, worksheets, quick quizzes, interesting videos, posters, etc. to help people better understand banks and other financial sector institutions. They created a digital resource library for NGOs that caters to women and young adults.

Ignite My Future: With schools across the world closing in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic, Tata Consultancy Services recognized the need for continued education and is addressing it using its pre-existing STEM development program, Ignite My Future in School. Volunteers conduct virtual classes 5 days a week and mentor young students.

Health and Sustainability: The theme POSHAN MAAH (Nutrition Month) 2020, as declared by the Government of India, focuses on two matters – identifying and tracking children with Severe Acute Malnutrition and promotion of kitchen gardens. Tata Consulting Engineers (TCE) demonstrated how to grow and consume nutrient-rich microgreens to caregivers and teachers. According to the second aspect of the theme on plantation drive, TCE also conducted a session on kitchen gardening, explaining its necessity and health benefits.

Wildlife Conservation: Volunteers from Tata Consumer Products created an awareness program on wildlife conservation and protection and created food packets for animals in Bangalore.

Mentoring Youth: Volunteers from Tata Projects and Tata Motors mentored young students on various topics like choosing careers, preparing for interviews, and soft skills development.

Digital Marathon: Tata Realty and Infrastructure pledged to donate a PPE kit to a frontline health worker for every 5 km ran by its volunteers at a specially curated digital marathon. 90 employees participated, and 169 PPE kits were donated.

Needs Assessment of Migrants: Volunteers from Tata Power reached out

to stranded migrants during the pandemic and conducted a needs assessment in partnership with the Tata Institute of Social Sciences.

While our efforts on virtual volunteering shall continue, we have many challenges to tackle:

- **Missing beneficiary connection:** Connecting directly with beneficiaries is one of the highlights of volunteering – this is difficult with virtual volunteering.
- **Screen fatigue:** To combat this, volunteering activities were designed as 'do-it-yourself' to allow employees to complete the activities on their own time.
- **Absence of NGO representatives during the activities:** On ground activities were facilitated by NGO representatives and they supported the volunteers in completing the activities.
- **Shorter duration:** It is difficult to virtually volunteer for long durations. Generally, training and awareness sessions were planned for up to 1 hour – one cannot expect beneficiaries to sit in front of mobile, laptops for long hours.
- **Missing on-site activities:** With virtual volunteering, most of the activities are focused on training, awareness, and fitness sessions. Volunteers miss activities where they also need to use their physical strength, such as cleanliness drives, plantation drives, sports activities, etc.
- **Team bonding:** This doesn't happen as sessions are conducted by individual volunteers.
- **Increase in participation:** It is a challenge to increase volunteering hours and commitments with virtual volunteering.

