



THE NEED FOR PRO BONO CONSULTING SERVICES IN INDIA

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Abstract

Pro bono consulting, that is otherwise known as skills based volunteering, is a concept that is relatively new to India. The term pro bono, was earlier used largely in the legal world, but today it applies to all areas of professional skills, that are offered free of cost or at a reduced cost, to help the lesser privileged. This paper discusses about professionals in India, lending their skills to NGOs, free of cost. India is a country that is home to a large number of NGOs, and many of them are unable to move to greater heights, as they lack the right resources to help them. At the same time, India has a wide pool of experienced and skilled professionals. Many of these skilled professionals, who work in the corporate sector, are interested in pro bono consulting offers. They see the need to help in ways that are beneficial to the society. Teams of professionals with various kinds of skills are getting together and forming their own nonprofit organizations, with the main objective of offering pro bono consulting services to NGOs, which are tailor-made according to their requirements. However, the awareness of this skills based volunteering needs to increase in India. Also, there should be many more organizations that connect the skilled professionals with the NGOs.

Introduction

Pro Bono is a short form of the Latin word 'Pro bono Publico', which means 'for the public good'. It refers to free services to the poverty stricken, or non-profit or charitable organizations. This is a Latin phrase for professional work done voluntarily without a fee or at a reduced fee. This can also be termed as skills based volunteering, and hence it is very different from the traditional volunteering.

This is very common in the legal profession, but is now being used in Technology, Marketing, Financial and Strategic consulting firms. In the United States of America, Rule 6.1 of the American Bar Association's Model Rules of Professional Conduct, lays out the obligation of attorneys to engage in pro bono. It says that every lawyer has a professional responsibility to provide legal services to those who are unable to pay. A lawyer should aspire to render at least 50 hours of pro bono public legal services per year.

Traditional Volunteering

This kind of volunteering is where an individual or group of people provide their services without any monetary gain, for a social cause. This could include any kind of voluntary service, and may not be related to the person's profession or skills. This type of volunteering has been happening in India for many years.

Pro Bono Volunteering

When individuals or companies offer their professional skills to non-profit organizations, to assist them in creating or improving their business practices, it is termed as pro bono volunteering. The volunteers use their education, knowledge, talent and skills to help the non-profit organizations in the areas of their expertise. Many individuals and organizations today are offering pro bono services to nonprofit or charitable organizations. This kind of volunteering results in long-term benefits to the nonprofit organizations.

India is a country with the second largest population in the world, at 1.3 billion and is still growing. There are many people who are below the poverty level. To come to their aid are also a large number of Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs) or Non Profit Organizations (NPOs) in the country.

The Difference between NGOs and NPOs

The words NGO and NPO are used synonymously today, but there is a thin line drawn between them.

A Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) is a voluntary group of individuals or an organization that is usually not affiliated with any government, and is formed to provide services or to advocate a public policy. NGOs can be classified as a kind of a non-profit organization.

A Non-Profit Organization (NPO) is a group that comes together to achieve a mission, rather than to make a profit. They plough back their extra earnings, back into the organization to achieve its objectives.



However in this paper they will be looked at as one, without differentiating between NGOs and NPOs.

Number of NGOs in India

In an exercise done by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) in India, to map the number of registered NGO's in India, it was found that there were 31 lakh NGOs. This is larger than the total number of schools in the country, which stands at only around 15 lakh. Hence the number of NGOs in the country is more than double the number of schools in the country. It is almost one NGO for every 400 people. However most of them are unregistered organizations. Also less than 10% of them have complied with the requirements of submitting their statement of accounts, with the Registrar of Societies.

Challenge Faced by NGOs

Most of the NGOs in India, although intend to do some good work for the society are unable to grow and extend their reach, as they face many challenges including the lack of the right manpower to help them. They do not have sufficient finances to attract skilled talent. Their funding being limited, they need to use it for the purpose of meeting the objectives of their organization, and hence they cannot afford to have high administrative costs. Their salaries are low, and can never be compared with the salaries that the organizations in the corporate or private sector pay. Hence people prefer to work in corporate or other organizations, rather than to join a NGO. However, there are some devoted and talented people who do not mind working in these organizations, as they have a strong passion and desire to serve the society. These kinds of people are very few in number. The NGOs try to manage to carry out their work within their limited resources, which are insufficient at most times. The NGOs are important to the growth of the country, as they are the people who are out in the field reaching out and helping the lesser privileged, or fighting for the social causes. Their contribution is immense, as they try to work on the social causes and also eradicate some of the ills that plague the country and affect its growth. These organizations need support in the form of pro bono consulting services.

India@75 Foundation and Taproot Foundation Report

In a study done by Taproot Foundation, New York USA, in collaboration with India@75 foundation of the Confederation of Indian Industries (CII) on pro bono in India, solutions were presented on how the skills, competencies, time and energy of Indian professionals could be channelized to build a better India through pro bono consulting and skill based volunteering. The pro bono potential of India is estimated to be USD 10 Bn by the year 2022.

India@75 is an initiative of the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) that was initiated by the Management guru, Late Prof C K Prahalad, who in 2007 presented it to the Indian diaspora at New York, where he spoke about the concept of India@75 as a way of realizing the dream of an inclusive, sustainable and developed India by the year 2022, when India completes 75 years of Independence. Volunteerism was identified as the main channel, and volunteers as the foot soldiers for achieving the objectives of India@75.

Taproot foundation is a US based organization that connects skilled volunteers with nonprofit organizations. According to them, most organizations dealing with social problems do not have access to the marketing, design, technology, management or strategic planning resources they need to succeed. Hence Taproot serves as an intermediary to help through pro bono services. Their mission is to lead, mobilize and engage professionals in pro bono service.

Their study says that the pro bono movement is growing in the United States, and they believe that Indian professionals and companies can certainly together build a better India, where the employees' time, skills and talent can be shared with nonprofit organizations. The need of the non-profits in India can be met by the skills of the large number of professionals in the country.

Practice of Pro Bono Consulting and its Benefits

Pro bono consulting can be done in various ways. This paper discusses three major channels of this service.

Individuals

Individuals, whichever may be their area of expertise, can spend a few hours of their free time with any NGO, to guide them in the necessary area, using their professional skills. NGOs will benefit, as they do not have to pay these professionals and at the same time they are getting professional help, which would otherwise be very expensive to them. These individuals can help them as consultants on a pro bono basis. They can also serve on the boards of these organizations and help them with professional advice. The professional, will find this work very satisfying at the end of the day, as it will be less stressful than his or her regular work. The professional as well as the NGO benefit from this.

Nonprofit Organizations

Today in India, there are nonprofit organizations that are formed by a team of professionals, from diverse sectors such as



Banking, Manufacturing, Marketing Consulting, Financial and Investment Advisory with expertise in Strategic Management, Finance, Marketing, Human Resources, Communication and Information Technology, who volunteer to help NGOs with their expertise. Their services are tailor-made for each NGO that they work with, depending on the NGO's requirements.

Corporate

With effect from April 1, 2014, every company, private limited or public limited, which either has a net worth of Rs. 500 crores, or a turnover of Rs. 1,000 crores, or net profit of Rs. 5 crores, has to spend at least 2% of its average net profit for the next three financial years on Corporate Social Responsibility. Corporates as part of their Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programme, should encourage their employees to spend time with the NGOs, and use their professional skills to upgrade and help the NGO to move forward with their work in a professional and organized manner. This could act as a great stress buster for the employees.

The concept Sabbaticals, is another practice that is slowly making its entry into the Indian corporate sector. This is found mostly in the Information Technology industry, as an employee benefit programme. Hence as a part of their employee benefit programme, if corporates allowed their employees, who have completed a certain number of years with the company, to take paid sabbaticals, these employees could spend time with NGOs and help them set up some of their systems and practices in a more organized way, which would help them in the long term. This will have three beneficiaries. Firstly, this will help the NGO, as discussed earlier in this paper. Secondly, this will help the employees to avoid burnout, caused by the stress due to the nature of work in today's corporate sector. Social work can be de-stressing for employees. It gives them a break from their regular routine, and helps them to help the lesser fortunate, using the skills that they are trained in, or that they have acquired. They would gain a lot of satisfaction by doing this. This will also benefit the corporates, as they would avoid losing their top talent to burnouts. When the employees return back to work, they will be recharged and their productivity will also increase.

Discussion

Pro bono consulting is an area that both professionals and companies should very seriously consider, and explore. There is also a need for intermediaries or consultants in India who can connect the NGOs with the skilled professionals who wish to offer their services pro bono. Pro bono consulting will help the professionals, the corporate, as well as the social sector in India. They should work hand in hand to improve India's economy and growth. This in turn, will help the country as a whole. India is looking at growth, and this can happen if all the sectors in the country grow at the same pace. Hence individuals, corporates and NGOs should join hands in working towards achieving sustainable development in the country.

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