

**The Business of Giving:  
Make Volunteering Part of Your Corporate Strategy**  
by Dave Sanford, EVP, Client Relations, [WinterWyman](#)

As the old adage says, "Charity starts at home." But charity is also making an appearance in the workplace. According to Giving USA, an annual survey of philanthropy, U.S. corporations donated \$18.22 billion in 2012.

Leaders at many organizations have embraced corporate philanthropy initiatives because they allow companies to give back to the communities in which they are located, and support causes related to their businesses. Philanthropy is an effective way to build goodwill, and it also provides an outlet for employees who want to volunteer their time to causes that are near and dear to them. Employees are able to make a personal connection to those in need and have a genuine impact on their local communities, the nation and even the world.

Many companies are developing corporate philanthropy programs because they strive to be more socially responsible corporate citizens. The benefits to the charities are immense — in addition to the billions of dollars donated each year, employees are also volunteering their time to make a difference.

It is well-known that volunteers often get as much — or more — out of working with charities than the recipients themselves. The sheer act of giving is its own reward. The same can be true for organizations. While companies are supporting charities and non-profit groups, they are also reaping benefits from these programs within their organizations. Of course, employers shouldn't develop corporate philanthropy programs solely to experience these rewards. Yet, these initiatives provide pleasant residual benefits, in addition to providing an opportunity to do good. Today, businesses of all sizes and types are discovering that they can do well by doing right.

In addition to being the right thing to do, here are some examples of how charitable giving can benefit and strengthen an organization's internal business strategies:

**To enhance employee relations** — Corporate philanthropy programs can be a very powerful way to increase cohesiveness and morale among employees. Participating in employer-sponsored programs allows employees the opportunity to volunteer and their altruism is endorsed by the office. It's also a great way for people to sample different types of volunteer work to see what a good personal fit is.

Corporate philanthropy programs also present many opportunities for team-building that would not normally occur during a typical day in the office. Employees are able to partner together across divisions and work in team environments outside of their direct work groups. People from different departments or offices, who typically wouldn't see each other during a workday, can serve a meal, volunteer in a classroom or help build a home, side-by-side. This promotes a greater sense of camaraderie and unity among employees as they work towards a shared mission and common goal.

Giving employees a chance to give back to their communities also helps to instill a sense of pride in themselves and their organization. They are proud to work for a company that supports philanthropic programs, which can lead to increased loyalty and better retention.

**To help define the corporate identity** — Some organizations are as well-known for their corporate philanthropy programs as they are for the products or services they provide. Charitable giving can become so ingrained in an organization's corporate culture, that it can actually be a cornerstone of the company's identity. It can be a way for organizations to differentiate themselves from the competition. Employees may begin to describe their jobs, work and company in different terms because of the good work the firm does. Senior leaders and employees can say, "This is who we are."

**As a powerful recruitment tool** — Structured corporate philanthropy programs can also help to attract the most accomplished and qualified candidates to organizations. Working for a company with a corporate conscience and a dedication to the community is appealing to employees and future employees across all generations. Having a corporate giving program can give organizations an edge over the competition so

that they can recruit top talent. In an economy when hiring dollars are stretched tight and every new hire needs to count, community philanthropy programs can often be the catalyst that makes a candidate choose an organization. In a robust economy, organizations can recruit the best and the brightest, even during a labor shortage, because employees want to work for a company that gives back.

## **Put Philanthropy into Action**

Organizations that have successful corporate philanthropy initiatives have several key factors in common. Here are some best practices for developing effective programs.

**Appoint someone to be in charge** — It is ideal if one person is accountable for heading up the corporate philanthropy program. At large organizations, this would be the person's sole job responsibility and at small companies, this may be part of an employee's responsibilities. In either case, he or she should have the authority to report directly to the CEO, which demonstrates to staff that this position and the program are valued by leadership.

**Secure senior management support** — Without buy-in from leadership, a corporate philanthropy program won't get off the ground. Employees need to feel that leadership isn't just tolerating a charitable giving program, but that it fully supports the program and encourages employees to participate. Leadership would also establish a budget and parameters for employees to donate their time.

**Promote employee involvement** — It is equally important to have support from employees. They need to be part of the process as the program is developed, and the charities and type of giving is discussed. Causes should be chosen based on what appeals to a majority of staff, not because they are the pet causes of senior management. Here are some ways to ensure employee participation:

- Conduct a survey - A company-wide survey is a great way to get feedback about where people want to spend their time and the organization's resources. Repeat the survey annually to identify changes.
- Develop a committee - Put together a committee made up of employees representing different areas of the organization. The committee can do the bulk of the research and groundwork for the program (such as identifying non-profit organizations and initiatives that support the identified causes) and present them to the general population.
- Take a vote - Use the results of the survey and committee research to whittle down the list of charities and opportunities to a manageable number. Then let employees vote on where they would like to focus their efforts.

**Clarify missions and budgets** — The person in charge needs to determine, with both senior management and the committee, how members of the organization will be involved. Will the company support a lot of charities with small donations, or a solo activity, or concentrate efforts and dollars on just a few non-profits? How will the program look? Will the organization donate dollars, time or a combination? How will corporate giving play a role? How will it be organized? Who will take part? How will charities be selected? How will employees be able to give their time and resources?

Corporate philanthropy programs are a valuable way for organizations to positively impact the communities in which they operate, and support causes related to their business lines. At the same time, they can build goodwill, enhance their reputations and improve employee relations. In this economy, corporate philanthropy programs can set organizations apart. Doing it correctly can be a large endeavor, but it can bring many rewards.