

The Strategic Art of Corporate Giving

There's no such thing as an unworthy cause

The 2010 World Giving Index issued by the international Not for Profit, Charities Aid Foundation (CAF) recently ranked Australia and New Zealand as the most giving countries in the world. Indeed, in recent years - and despite the global financial crisis - charitable donations have been on the rise. This is the case for both personal and corporate giving.

Corporate Australia has heard much debate about Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and Corporate Community Investment / Involvement (CCI) and been witness to many examples of Australian companies committing to such activities. While different companies take different approaches to their CSR and CCI strategies and are at different levels of development, companies on the whole are looking to make their approach to community engagement more strategic and business-focused than ever before.

It is often said that there is no such thing as an unworthy cause. So how do you go about choosing a charity or community group for your company to support and setting a strategy to make the most of your efforts?

Consider the following:

- **Financial analysis** - How much are your donations likely to be in a year? Set financial targets and consider how this level of funding might impact charities of different sizes.
- **Type of investment** – Will your organisation just be donating money, getting involved through volunteering or running a workplace giving program where staff regularly donate a portion of their wages? Working out what is actually possible within your organisation might make it easier to select your target charities.
- **Time commitments** – Investing in a long term relationship with an organisation can have positive effects that will continue to compound over time. How much time can you commit to the organisation and over what period?
- **Get your team on board** - Survey your staff and get them involved in the decision making process. This is particularly important if you plan to ask staff to commit time and money to the cause. What areas of focus are preferred (eg Health, Children or Welfare organisations)? Once you have narrowed down the focus area, ask staff to vote on a shortlist of charities related to that area.
- **Support based on personal experience** - Do you or members of your team have an emotional connection to a particular charity? Has someone connected to your organisation suffered from a particular illness? Are there community groups in which members of your team are involved which might be suitable to support (eg arts groups, sporting clubs or schools)?
- **Benefits for your brand** – It is reasonable to link an increase in community investment to an improvement in your company's image. Put yourself in your customer's shoes. How might they react to your chosen charity or activity? Is there an opportunity to get your clients and business contacts involved (eg seats at performances or attendance at fundraising events)? Think about your business and branding objectives and find a cause that is a logical fit.

- **Local versus global** – Are you looking to make an impact in your local community, or would you prefer to put your weight behind a larger, more global cause such as the environment? Consider your target market. Where do new customers usually come from? Do you provide services locally, nationally or internationally? These considerations all impact where your efforts should be directed.
- **Report, monitor and evaluate** – Decide up front how you will track and evaluate your community involvement. This will enable you to decide year to year how you can make your efforts efficient and impactful for the benefit of all involved.

Does your organisation have a CSR or CCI strategy? Are you supporting charities or community organisations on an ad hoc basis, yet see the need to formalise your strategy?

Promoting a symbiotic relationship between corporations and communities is critical in ensuring the overall health of a society. There are mutual benefits and advantages for the organisations on both sides of the equation. But theory and strategy aside, providing support where it is needed most just feels good - to you and to your team.