

SPECIAL SECTION

REAL JOBSITE SOLUTION STORIES

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Give a Little, Get a Lot

Engage in community service to transform your community and strengthen your business.

We usually think of philanthropy in the construction industry as a way of solving problems and serving the community. However, a large body of research documents a positive connection between philanthropic activities and a firm's financial success: Firms that give back tend to be more successful.

Construction firms are in a unique position to help create new or better facilities, improve infrastructure and build homes. Many firms offer pro bono construction services to organizations of their choice, partner with nonprofits such as Habitat for Humanity to build needed houses, or join relief and rebuilding programs that respond to the devastation of infrastructure during natural disasters.

Even the most prosperous community faces challenges that are difficult to solve. Someone always needs help.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS?

Engaging in community service offers a range of benefits. Some of these are directly related to brand, public perception and marketing, while others can impact leadership development as well as staff recruiting and retention. Benefits include:

- Building the firm's positive brand identity and competitive position, making the firm more visible in the community
- Building relationships with government officials and community leaders, which can help reduce regulatory and special interest group obstacles
- Attracting and retaining talented staff who are aligned with the firm's values
- Improving the economic conditions in the firm's community, with the

long-term goal of enhancing the size and quality of the client base

- Providing learning and leadership development opportunities for staff. Young people can be given challenges that will help them develop new skills, gain experience on new project types and learn to lead and communicate with a diverse team.
- Providing firms with new ideas, access to technical expertise and

opportunities for research and development collaboration through grants to universities and research organizations

HOW TO GET STARTED

The impetus for beginning a community service program often comes from the firm's owner, board of directors, senior team members or their spouses—someone who has a personal interest in a

5 CONSIDERATIONS:

STARTING A COMMUNITY SERVICE PROGRAM

- 1. Manifest your values.** Find a cause or develop a program that aligns with the firm's values statement, or consider the values held by the owners and leadership team. What community needs match these values?
- 2. Further the firm's mission.** As a reflection of your long-term vision and purpose, the mission statement can be helpful in determining how to engage in service. If your mission is to be the best builder in Maple County, consider what help is needed for Maple County to thrive and grow.
- 3. Support the firm's strategies.** The overall theme and structure of a community service program can be aligned with and support the firm's strategy. For example, if your strategic goal is to be the preferred builder of schools and universities, then an educational focus in community service will complement your strategy for achieving that market position.
- 4. Structure your program carefully.** The next step is to determine the amount of resources to allocate, how staff will be involved, how to handle other opportunities that come up, how to assess the organizations or effort you are supporting, and how to measure the effectiveness of your donations.
- 5. Develop a communication plan.** Create a plan for letting clients, community and government leaders know what the firm is doing. As Arasi puts it, "Community service polishes the reputation of a contractor and can make them more desirable to work with." While some may fear that publicizing your philanthropic work will seem self-serving, remember that being public about what you do helps create a culture of giving, both within the firm and in the community.

cause that sparks an ongoing program in the firm. A firm may help the community respond to a natural disaster, then realize the need persists even after the recovery effort has ended. The same is true of education and health care programs—the need never goes away.

“Our community service program came about when we were working for a large oncology group,” says John Arasi, CEO of Sharp General Contractors of Pompano Beach, Fla. “We walked through the lobby on our way to meetings and saw how many people were there—kids supporting their moms and grandparents, parents bringing in their children, patients of all incomes and situations. Cancer hits everyone.” Once Arasi and his team saw firsthand how much help was needed, they decided to take action. The team has raised nearly \$1 million through organizing fundraising events, supporting Relay for Life and, this year, contributing \$25,000 to the Haitian

outreach program of the Cancer Support Community of Greater Miami. “We got started because we saw for ourselves how many cancer patients need help,” Arasi says. “You just have to do it. It’s the right thing.”

FOLLOW YOUR HEART

Working with a wide range of charities has helped Madison-based Findorff become highly recognizable in the community. Company President Dave Beck-Engel says, “We can go to any event and someone there knows one of our people. Everyone knows someone at Findorff.”

Beck-Engel adds, “Community service has been part of Findorff since it was founded in 1890. We think part of a person’s growth is bigger than just their work, so we encourage our people to be involved in the community. A side benefit is that this intuitively attracts great people to our firm.” To celebrate 120 years in business, Findorff set up the “120

Challenge.” In one year, the staff donated 2,042 hours to more than 125 nonprofits. Their efforts have earned them numerous awards, including Most Community Minded Company in Wisconsin.

Beck-Engel offers this advice to firms getting started in community service: “If you’re new to this, just follow your heart. See where you’re being led. There is tremendous need out there, so it’s not hard to find someone needing your help. Decide what aligns with you, then jump in with both feet.” **CBO**

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