

## Civic Involvement

# Corporate Giving

There are important business reasons  
your company should partner  
with non-profits

*By Jennifer Levine Hartz*

- W**hy do companies get involved with non-profit organizations?
- a) Government regulation requires it.
  - b) There's pressure from clients, colleagues and suppliers.
  - c) To attract media attention.
  - d) The CEO has a personal commitment to a cause.
  - e) Employees expect it.
  - f) It is the right thing to do

Any of the above answers might motivate a company to give to some causes, but their commitment will be under-leveraged unless it is directly tied to core business strategy.

Smart companies from Avon to Lifetime TV network, from Timberland to the Atlanta Falcons football team understand the real power behind community involvement. Therefore, they know what programs to set up and what to expect from them. Each of these companies lists "community partnerships" as one of their top *business strategies* and provides significant resources for them to succeed.

What does success look like to a company involved in a community partnership? For many, it means that core corporate objectives are achieved. Targets might include:

- ▀ Human-resources: decreased turnover, increased diversity, stronger ability to attract talent, team-building, training and development opportunities



## Corporate Giving

- Marketing: new product introduction, brand awareness, PR, differentiation, improved client relationships, increased sales
- Cost-savings: reduced waste, increased utilization, proper accounting credits
- Legal: staying ahead of the curve on government regulation and expectations

Well-designed and executed community relations programs can accomplish any or all of these goals – and more.

The Rich's Partners in Time volunteer program invests 12,500 hours into the Atlanta community each year. Joe Vella, divisional vice president of community affairs, and Ron Klein, CEO of the department store company (now called Rich's-Macy's), firmly believe that "Rich's is a superior place to work for a number of reasons, but the company's active support of employee volunteering has been tremendously important throughout our history," Vella says. "It is part of what makes working at Rich's special; our customers can feel the difference."

Civic involvement can bring other benefits. "Clearly, our firm wins new clients by providing excellent service, but our 'Adding Up to Make A Difference' program significantly increased our access to decision-makers and we have seen new business as a direct result," says Guy Budinscak, Atlanta managing partner of Deloitte & Touche, an international accounting and consulting firm. "This past year presented an opportunity for us to propose on a lot of new client work; our multi-faceted commitment to the community clearly gave us an advantage in that process."

Cingular Wireless was the title sponsor of Hands On Atlanta's recent Martin Luther King Jr. Citizen Service Summit. The company's participation enabled thousands of people to better understand King's messages of diversity, inclusion and non-violence. Senior Vice President Rick Bradley believes that this investment is an extension of the company's mission, which is to support and enhance customers' need for self-expression. This event provided a "perfect fit" for the Cingular brand.

A company cannot give simply because "it is the right thing to do." For one thing, a company has no inherent moral compass; it is a legal entity with fiscal responsibility to its stakeholders. It can, however, publicize the impact of its non-profit partners, inspire employees to greater personal involvement and enjoy the mutual benefits of a solid investment. Strategic alliances with smart, effective, creative, responsible non-profit organizations will enable them to deliver the high-impact programs that improve everyone's quality of life.

When I was on a trip to Poland not long ago, I met with leaders from Poland's Corporate Social Responsibility organization. Even in a newly capitalist nation, there were business leaders who understood the virtuous cycle that can be created by collaboration with non-profits. I tell my clients, "We will develop a community relations strategy that improves your bottom line. After we implement it, you will continue to be involved because it makes good business sense." That night, I go to sleep knowing that strong non-profit organizations and their dedicated volunteers will be able to do more and better work for our world.

**Jennifer Levine Hartz** is President of Corporate Hartz, LLC, a strategic community relations consulting firm based in Atlanta. The firm's web site is [www.corporatehartz.com](http://www.corporatehartz.com).