

How Non-Profits Can Help Your Business

Non-profit organizations play an important role in the economic and social well-being of cities, states and subsequently, the nation. They provide an organized means for people to contribute time, money and skills to advance a public or community interest for the greater good, rather than personal or financial gain. As their name suggests, non-profits do not make money, but rather funnel all their financial gains back into the organization to pay expenses and continue and grow their mission. So the importance of outside businesses to support non-profits cannot be understated, especially during times of a national economic downturn. But it doesn't just help the non-profits. Businesses who partner with community organizations open themselves up to new networks and are able to market themselves, while improving employee morale, in ways they couldn't have otherwise.

"In an increasingly difficult fundraising environment, corporate support is essential to creating new programs and expanding current services so we can reach the people most in need," explains Jen Silvers, MBA, Executive Director, YMCA of Greater New York—Flushing. "At the YMCA, our corporate partners have played a critical role in ensuring we can offer everything from academic support, extracurricular activities and physical fitness to youth across the City. Such support comes back in dividends for the company too—it allows them to reinvest in their communities and create thriving neighborhoods."

"These collaborations are a two way street," says Carol Simon, Executive Director, Boys and Girls Club of Metro Queens. "We obtain funding to support our programs, and businesses get recognition in the local media for their good works."

Chelsea Freemon, Director of Development and Communications for Astoria-based ZONE 126 noted that there is far more than media recognition to be gained by companies supporting non-profits; there is tremendous financial gain as well. "Businesses should be investing in the communities where their employees live and work. Other than the inherent social good, there is a practical economic prospective; a return on investment. Research shows that a higher earning potential of people in communities translates to more earnings for companies."

And it isn't just the immediacy of raising a community's buying potential. Chelsea further explained the snowball effect of non-profit support beyond this initial positive fallout. "As the residents' fortunes benefit, they spend more; businesses grow, which elevates the area, enticing people to the community. This in turn increases

the number of consumers who further the profits of the businesses and so on."

Although the most common method of helping non-profits is a financial, support can come in several forms.

"Monetary support is critically important, but employee participation is as well," says Silvers. "We have a saying at the Y: 'gifts of talent, time and treasure are greatly appreciated.' Whether it's cleaning up a park or providing tutoring lessons, being there makes a difference."

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**-Chelsea Freemon
Zone 126**

"Some cases it's a company being able to say, 'our staff went to the boys and girls club. They loved it and it was our day of giving back,' notes Blair Trunzo, Executive Director, Variety Boys & Girl Club Of Queens, Inc. "It's something that can be helpful in building morale and team-building—working as adults together on a project—not necessarily for PR. There was a group that came in—they were wonderful—and they helped us rebuild our Broccoli Theater. All of the employees from their organizations came over and helped us revamp this room. It was such a wonderful experience. And while down the road I'm sure there's some PR, that wasn't what their intent was. Their intent was to come and work together on a project outside their realm and do it for the kids and the community."

Freemon stressed the value of skill-based volunteering in addition to simply donating one's time. Financial institutions, for example, can provide important financial education, such as budget planning, to which low-income families don't ordinarily have access. "People don't realize that they do have quite a bit to give in talent and services," she explains, noting the additional benefits of the employee satisfaction that comes from such endeavors. "When people feel they are giving back, they are happier. Happier employees are

more productive employees!"

For the larger, more prominent non-profits, most partnerships are initiated through a company contacting the organization to see how they can help. "Partnerships form based on relationships and when a company and nonprofit recognize how they can help each other. Even a simple phone call from a company to a non-profit executive asking how they can help can set in motion a meaningful relationship," says Silvers.

Freemon concurs, but for a relatively unknown non-profit, such as Zone 126, establishing a more lasting bond is even of greater importance. "Rather than a one-time check, we're looking for a deeper relationship, and part of doing that is aligning what a company does with what we do. It's not just a donation; it's an investment." Freemon also cites the benefit of a smaller, less affluent non-profit, like Zone 126, being a member of the Chamber of Commerce. "It's essential in approaching or getting noticed by potential business partners."

All agreed it is in the establishment of a strong relationship, which forms the nucleus of a good partnership. Says Simon, "The essential ingredients to a good non-profit partnership includes respect; showing thanks for the company's generosity; and constantly informing our corporate partners as to what is happening at the club."

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