

# Five Steps To Building A Corporate Social Responsibility Program

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) may seem like a daunting undertaking. But, with a tangible action plan, large and small companies alike can pursue a CSR program that can positively change both the community and the company itself.



Photo via [Craig Whitehead](#)

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) may seem like a daunting undertaking. But, with a tangible action plan, large and small companies alike can pursue a CSR program that can positively change both the community and the company itself. Whether the motivation for change comes from the bottom up or top down, CSR has the potential to align a company's goals with a mission for social good.

**Here are five steps to**

## **1. Build from the Bottom Up**

To be effective, a CSR program should be “owned” by employees at all levels. Each employee can contribute in his or her way, but each needs to be motivated to do so, both to feel a part of the program and to feel good about participating. How to get that buy-in? Get a mix of employees together with a group leader or facilitator to brainstorm ideas, articulate and understand the company’s culture and values, and identify what individuals are passionate about. As ideas develop, research the opportunities and the proposed organizations and have the group re-examine and refine the opportunities.

## **2. Decide on an Approach**

A key decision is whether the company as a whole will exclusively support one or more causes, allow employees to pursue their own passions, or do a combination of both. For example, a company may have its employees volunteer for a day at a local food bank or help build a house for Habitat for Humanity. Or it may support individual efforts of each employee, who may, for example, conduct community education programs for families with a child with special needs, serve as a Girl Scout troop leader or coach runners who race to raise money for a charity. Or it may be a combination in which the company has a primary project but also supports individuals with their own projects.

## **3. Establish the Relationships**

Next, establish the relationships with the community partners. In doing so, be sure to define expectations. For example, in what activities will your company or its employees participate, how often and when, and what additional contributions will it or they make? If your employees make financial contributions, will they be matched by the company? What do you expect of the organization to make the program successful? For example, is training or transportation needed?

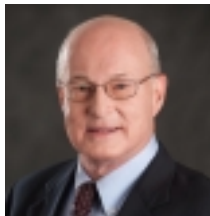
## 4. Communicate It?

My marketing friends immediately jump on the question mark. Of course, they say, communicate it! Market what you're doing – internally and externally! But, as a company, you need to decide if pursuing the program because of the company's values or the value it provides to your employees is enough. At a recent program about CSR programs for which I was a panelist, some companies said they pursued their CSR activities for their intrinsic value and did not pursue any marketing; others chose to shout it out. At a minimum, companies need to assess how best to communicate the program to the employees in order to foster employee pride and engagement.

## 5. Sustain It

It is valuable to communicate what you are doing because that will help to sustain and reinforce the program. Celebrate your work, but strive to do more. This helps to keep the program alive and employees engaged in continuing the good work you are doing. Establish goals for the program and develop a method to assess how you are doing. Report your findings regularly both internally and ideally externally as well, which will help to hold you accountable.

If the program catches on, celebrate the accomplishment, but do not stop there. See how it is affecting your company's culture and value system. At some point, you may want to go to the next level by reflecting those values in your organizational structure and policies and creating a true social enterprise within your company as a whole. But these tips are just to get you started; the rest is up to you.



**Douglas E. Singer**

Founding Principal at Falcon & Singer P.C.

An attorney with more than 35 years of experience, Douglas E. Singer is a founding principal of Falcon & Singer P.C. Singer is also responsible for launching the firm's emerging social enterprise practices, where he works with individuals, businesses and nonprofit organizations interested in pursuing social, environmental and economic responsibility initiatives through entities such as benefit corporations. He led Falcon & Singer P.C.'s initiative in becoming a certified B corporation.