

Developing a Coordinated Corporate Social Responsibility Program

By Elizabeth A. Wall

Last month in Marketing The Law Firm, I discussed what a corporate social responsibility (CSR) program entails and how the key to creating a successful CSR program is to establish stakeholder value across the board. This article explains the seven steps to be taken in establishing such a coordinated CSR program

In order for a firm to make a commitment to a CSR program, it must create a committee; discuss the drivers; set goals; formulate policies; source community partners; implement projects; and measure impact. The law firm's approach to CSR should be reflective of the vision, strategy and organizational culture. Furthermore, a well-designed CSR program is driven from the management committee down. There will be capital expenditures,

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material costs and general overhead may rise as a result of some of the CSR program initiatives. However, the hope is that with these efforts, the firm is able to attract new clients who will offset the CSR program cost and develop efficiencies.

CREATE A COMMITTEE

We all know that committees and groups are part of law-firm culture. Including a variety of attorneys and staff in various roles in the firm is important in establishing a CSR program. Many firms have an overall CSR committee and in some firms, committee members are broken down into project-specific initiatives such as pro bono, recycling or community giving. Including a variety of people encourages mass participation in workplace initiatives, creates a sense of ownership, and establishes an informal policing system so that goals and targets are met.

DISCUSS THE DRIVERS

When the committee is being formed, it is important that the members understand why they are being brought together. As stated earlier, a CSR program must be embedded into the values of the firm and the management committee must clearly state why there is a belief in and a commitment to establishing the program. It then becomes that committee's role as stewards to establish a formal CSR program and clearly communicate to the

other members of the firm why there is an interest and who from management supports it.

SET GOALS

Setting goals is important regardless of the organization or the project. Goals must be clearly defined as the CSR program is being established and should be measurable at the end. I believe that we can learn about goal-setting from the vertical market of investment banks. In a case study, one of the world's largest global investment banks, recognized that an effective environmental policy must first begin with a focus on minimizing the impact of their operations. Once it was established that an investment bank would have an environmental policy, a committee was formed and goals were set. Some of the goals were to: reduce indirect greenhouse gas emissions by 7% from leased and owned offices; increase the use of recycled and environmentally certified wood,

SEVEN STEPS IN DEVELOPING A COORDINATED CSR PROGRAM

1. Create a committee.
2. Discuss the drivers.
3. Set goals.
4. Formulate policies.
5. Source community partners.
6. Implement projects.
7. Measure impact.

paper and print products; use energy-efficient equipment; and purchase more organic and sustainably harvested products and supplies. Having specific goals like these allows the organization (whether it is an investment bank or a law firm) to measure how successful or unsuccessful the CSR program is at any point.

FORMULATE POLICIES

Formulating a CSR policy is much like establishing a strategic plan for the firm. Establishing CSR policies assists internal drivers such as recruitment, retention, and workplace culture, as well as external drivers such as winning business, retaining client, community investment, and environmental concerns. All of these driver's contribute to shareholder value.

SOURCE COMMUNITY PARTNERS

Sourcing the community and looking for stand-alone activities and long-term schemes that meet people's various expectations and preferences can be difficult. A comprehensive CSR program needs to harness people's professional and personal skills and get them excited and enthusiastic about being involved. There are many community organizations that will seek assistance from a law firm, but the firm must selectively choose which projects are right for them to be involved with. Partnerships should be formed where the goals of both the law firm and the community partner are being met.

IMPLEMENT PROJECTS

Forming the committee, establishing goals, and partnering with community organizations are not enough. The firm must implement and act on what it says it is going to do. CSR programs can often lose steam in the

implementations stage. While members of the firm may be enthusiastic and interested in a CSR program, once it becomes time to go to the community center or work with the building to make sure the recycling is not going into the landfill, the desire to follow through is often lost. It is therefore up to the members of the committee to police and continue to motivate one another in the follow through necessary for a successful CSR program.

MEASURE IMPACT

Impact measurement is the only way to tell if the CSR initiatives are truly working. The goals that were established earlier in the planning process are now evaluated and calculate to see how much progress has been made. By setting targets, tracking participation, benchmarking how other firms are performing in their CSR programs, monitoring diversity and assessing the environment, a firm can evaluate how successful their program has been.

CONCLUSION

As can be seen, in order for a law firm to establish a CSR program, they need to allocate time, financial resources and human capital. Following the steps set forth above can ensure that your program is a success. Furthermore, as a bonus, firms that encourage employees to get involved in community events are creating good will grass-roots marketing upon which no price tag can be placed.