

Great Ideas from Your Colleagues: The Best of LBG's May Audio Conference

In one short hour, a multitude of great ideas for coping with declining philanthropy budgets were presented at LBG Research Institute's May 13th audio conference. We share here the best of the best:

Tap into other functional areas' resources when yours are strained.

Case Study: CSX

With prices for advertising dropping, CSX community relations was able to piggyback on their company's branding campaign, adding their corporate citizenship message into the company ads in 2009. Working with their marketing department, community relations crafted the story it wanted to tell in radio and print in the communities where it supports City Year teams. Tori Kaplan, director of corporate citizenship and special events and an LBG member, believes that this additional communication has greatly enhanced the impact of CSX's community support programs.

Case Study: FedEx Social Responsibility

FedEx is a supporter of the organization Safe Kids Worldwide, which fits into one of their focus areas: child pedestrian safety. Safe Kids' mission is to prevent unintentional childhood injury. Together, Safe Kids and FedEx created the "Walk This Way" program that teaches kids pedestrian safety. As important as their mission is, Safe Kids lacked the visibility that older and larger organizations, such as United Way, enjoy. The solution? FedEx Social Responsibility used the company's marketing partnership with the NFL to get the word out about Safe Kids. The result? It was "a bonanza" for the organization, said Stephanie Butler, manager of corporate contributions.

Take inventory of your company's resources

Case Study: Timberland

Timberland has never focused on cash grants alone. Instead, the Company considers what other resources it can share with its non-profits partners. The result? A powerful employee volunteering program, strategic product donations including an annual donation of official City Year uniform pieces, and donation of office space to the local City Year site.

Case Study: CSX

What started as a convenience and donation to one organization has grown into a service available to many. CSX, also a partner with City Year, realized that they could save City Year the cost of supplying tools to each work site by outfitting a 53-foot container with everything a worksite needs and sending it by rail to each site—for free, of course. That program has grown to two containers, one on each side of the Mississippi, that travel not only to City Year work sites, but its other partners as well. Another partner is Dignity U Wear, a foundation

that collects, warehouses and distributes new clothing to families in need. CSX provides transportation of the clothing they collect, saving them money they can invest in other projects. This donation also saves carbon emissions by moving truck traffic to rails—a nice bonus.

Get creative with your employee volunteer recognition.

Case Study: EMBARQ

If you are counting on your employees to keep your impact in the community high, LBG research shows that having a good recognition program can help achieve success. LBG member EMBARQ has crafted a recognition program that really works. Julie Hershey, director of CSR and community relations, shared some elements of it in the audio conference.

First, the company has Community Relations Teams (CRTs) comprised of employees and a trained chair that support the local service markets. These teams have multiple ways to earn points toward winning the company's Spirit Awards: they get points for logging their volunteer hours, for supporting the company's goals and community relations initiative, and more. Nearly 70% of teams win a Spirit Award every year which include CEO recognition and awards for the charities.

Second, although the company does not have a formal Dollars for Doers program, they do hold a monthly drawing for a charitable grant. Any employee who has volunteered at least 10 hours that month is entered into the drawing for the grant.

Take this opportunity to have open and honest discussions with your nonprofit partners.

All the panelists agreed that being open and honest with your nonprofit partners is a great way to forge long-term, win-win partnerships based on satisfying the needs of the corporate grantmaker as much as the nonprofit. When your door is always open to the nonprofit, they feel safe asking you for what you need, listening to your needs, and understanding your limitations. In the best incarnation, a partnership is one in which you are problem-solvers for each other.

Ironically, these difficult times can be an opportunity—an opportunity to make your programs better, more efficient, more effective. Take the time to rethink and reassess the grants you make by rote every year. Actively seek nonprofit partners that need the resources you have. Take advantage of senior management's interest in ROI to better your measurement and evaluation practices. Get creative in your employee recognition programs. These activities don't take money and can lead to a more impactful community involvement program.