

# Good Community Engagement Is Good for Business

By Jacquelyn Schneider

*A Community Engagement Strategy is the best way to support mutual interests between the community and an organization.*

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is a new way of doing business that focuses on making a positive impact in the world. A Community Engagement Strategy (CES) is a way for organizations to maximize mutual business and community benefit. A CES contains multiple components, including alignment to the organization's strategic plan, key areas of interest in the community, engagement plans, and a method to track progress. Together, CSR and CES form a customized strategy that aligns the company's social impact and business aspirations.

Consumers are seeking products and experiences that align with their values and make a positive social impact. According to recent surveys, an estimated 82 percent of U.S. consumers say that corporate social responsibility factors into their decision-making process when buying a good or service (Inc. 2022 and Cone 2017).<sup>1,2</sup> People are also seeking more meaning in their lives and work; they want to make a difference in the world through their jobs.

A Community Engagement Strategy can be a component of a company's approach to increasing Corporate Social Responsibility and a way to make contributions to the community and their employees and customers. It can also be used as a mechanism to build upon employee



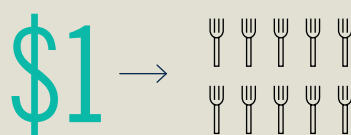
enthusiasm and align with the companies' strategic initiatives to then drive positive impact. Every company in today's market should develop and implement a community engagement strategy. This article will explain the benefits and components of a community engagement strategy.

### THE BENEFITS OF A COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

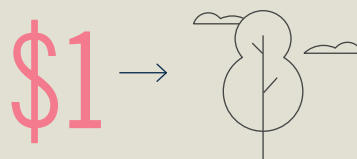
There are 10 benefits of implementing a Community Engagement Strategy.

1. In business, it helps develop a unified purpose, build trust, and share values among employees.
2. Build connections and deeper relationships in the city the organization serves, providing employees leadership or growth opportunities outside of work.
3. Create additional opportunities for employees to find greater fulfillment at work and in life, which in turn builds a sense of belonging in the world (HBR 2021).<sup>3</sup>
4. Boost employee morale and add meaning to their relationship with work and the community. When surveyed, 70 percent of respondents felt a shared volunteer experience boosted morale better than a company-sponsored happy hour (Deloitte 2017).<sup>4</sup>

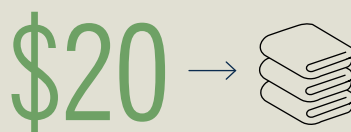
**Feeding America** turns \$1 into at least 10 meals.



**One Tree Planted** takes \$1 and plants one tree.



**UNICEF** uses \$20 to provide warm blankets for three children.



5. Benefits a:

- Chief Executive Officer wanting to relocate a headquarters or start a new office in a new market.
- Chief Human Resource Officer wanting to enhance employee culture by offering additional fulfilling opportunities.
- Chief Diversity Officer wanting to provide more opportunities to serve in and learn from the community.
- Community Engagement Lead seeking additional win-wins for employees and the community.

6. The communities benefit as well by attracting investment to improve economic development, involvement in K-12 education or university relations, and service to a variety of nonprofit organizations.

7. Depending on the focus of the Community Engagement Strategy, different nonprofit or education centers may benefit by receiving time, talent, or treasure. For example, an organization may want to focus a portion of its Community Engagement Strategy efforts on ending food insecurity and would therefore partner with a local community food bank to (1) Donate food, (2) Fundraise, (3) Participate in an event, and/or (4) Serve on the board.

8. Community organizations can make real and quantitative impacts. For example, Feeding America turns \$1 into at least 10 meals (Feeding America 2022),<sup>5</sup> One Tree Planted takes \$1 and plants one tree (One Tree Planted 2022),<sup>6</sup> and UNICEF uses \$20 to provide warm blankets for three children (UNICEF 2022).<sup>7</sup>

9. The community gains exposure to business leaders and employees as they tackle challenges together.

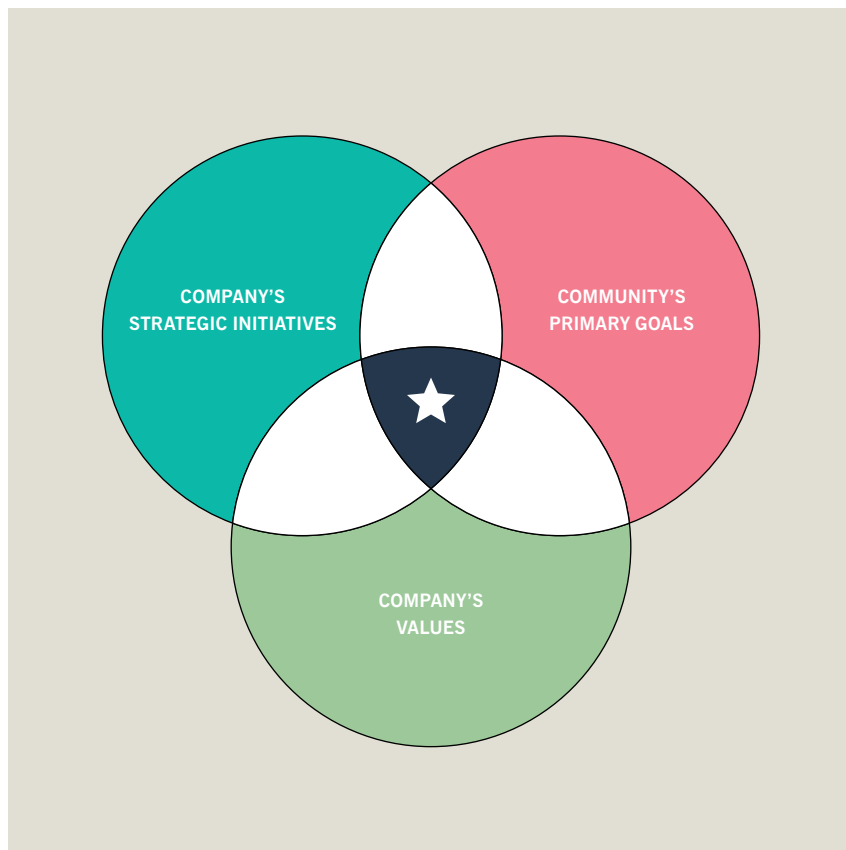
10. The community is seen in a positive light for being known to foster relationships with businesses that contribute to thriving communities.

### HOW TO CREATE YOUR COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

Once the decision to pursue a Community Engagement Strategy is made, the CES must align with the organization's strategic initiatives and the community's primary goals. As a best practice, the implementation process moves through four key stages: define, prioritize, engage, and track.

**Define:** The organization will want to align their CES to the primary goals of the customers and the communities the organization serves. A good place to start learning about a community's priorities is by engaging with the local or state chamber of commerce. For example, a city may want to prioritize economic development or access to quality education, etc. Focus on making an impact where there is mutual benefit for the business, community, and your customers.

When defining the key areas to make an impact, here are a few



aspects to consider. Be authentic to the mission, vision, and values of the organization. Focus on relationships that you have currently and on gaps that can be addressed with the CES. By crowdsourcing and surveying, the organization can look to where the employees are already plugging into the community. Incorporate these items into the design and define the key areas where you would like to make an impact.

**Prioritize:** Expanding outward, how might the strategic initiatives align with the community? What are the key opportunities in the community, and what important organizations are already tackling these causes? After this stage, you should have a prioritized list of opportunities to engage that may include notable organizations, places to donate, K-12 schools or universities, etc.

**Engage:** As a best practice, use a process that is straightforward when selecting the leaders and employees who will receive curated engagement plans. For example, when establishing

a new office in a new market, the organization may decide that top-line leaders are a strong, core group, to start with. Another method might be to select the group already identified as high-value talent. Or third, the organization might implement an application system with set criteria to evaluate potential employees. Consider the opportunity to include more leaders over time or establish a new cohort of leaders each year for the process.

For ideal results, tie engagement plans to performance goals. Engage Human Resources early in the process to align on goals and outcomes and determine the best course of action for adding these new metrics to the specific employee population. For each employee, co-design an engagement plan with key goals that are SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and timely). Once alignment is achieved on the engagement plan with the employee, follow the designated process from Human Resources to add this component to the employee's profile.

## CASE STUDY

### The Client:

A Fortune 500 financial services company was expanding into a new market. Executives wanted the leaders who were relocating to plug into the community early and in key opportunities that aligned with the company's strategic initiatives. Making a positive social impact is an important company value, so they partnered with Jabian Consulting to develop their Community Engagement Strategy.

Still, it is important to keep in mind that community engagement is for everyone. While the organization might focus on developing individual plans for the top-line leaders, consider implementing approaches for employees at all levels. These offerings could highlight select nonprofits the organization chooses to partner with for events and philanthropic opportunities.

**Track:** In the final stage, implement a strategic dashboard tool to document progress on the engagement plans and impact within the community, e.g., the number of organizations served, number of volunteer hours, top employee volunteers, etc. Dashboards are the central mechanism for tracking progress within the business, and they allow for recognition, reporting, and ultimately driving accountability. Along the way, collect data to showcase the progress and areas of opportunity. Tell the story of the organization's journey and outcomes to maintain momentum.

### The Challenge:

One of the ways the organization wanted to support the leaders who were establishing the new market was through identifying and prioritizing community impact opportunities and curating an outreach plan for each of its executives to make meaningful connections in the community.

### The Strategy:

A team of Jabian consultants helped the client understand the key strategic initiatives of the business and align the Community Engagement Strategy with them. The team also identified opportunities to boost social impact, university engagement, and investment in talent and culture. Through a rigorous interview process, an engagement plan was curated and shared with each leader and Human Resources. The outreach plans provided the best opportunities for the leader to plug into the local community and take the next steps.

## CONCLUSION

A Community Engagement Strategy is the best way to support mutual interests between the community and an organization. Not only does the employees' time, talent, and treasure generate a tremendous amount of value for the community, but the arrangement also helps promote employee belonging, purpose, and overall well-being. 🙌

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#### Sources:

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