

# Do Well by Doing Good Together: Building a Mutually Beneficial CSR Program

By Carmen Ferrigno and Dina Silver Pokedoff

A dynamic corporate social responsibility program is one of the best ways companies can solidify their organization's reputation and measurably influence long-term business success. But to do that, a CSR program must have a clear vision of success that delivers real, quantifiable business results. Moving from a disconnected philanthropic giving practice to a business-informed CSR strategy requires executing on a blueprint that integrates business goals, CSR strategies and clear, focused communications.

**Saint-Gobain** found itself at a crossroads in early 2010. It had a strong tradition of corporate giving in North America through the Saint-Gobain Corporation Foundation, but donations were diffuse, with relatively little opportunity for deeper involvement, such as employee volunteerism, product assistance or community relations building. It knew that a 350-year-old company with 250 locations, approximately 15,000 employees and \$6.2 billion in revenue in North America alone, should be able to make a bigger impact.

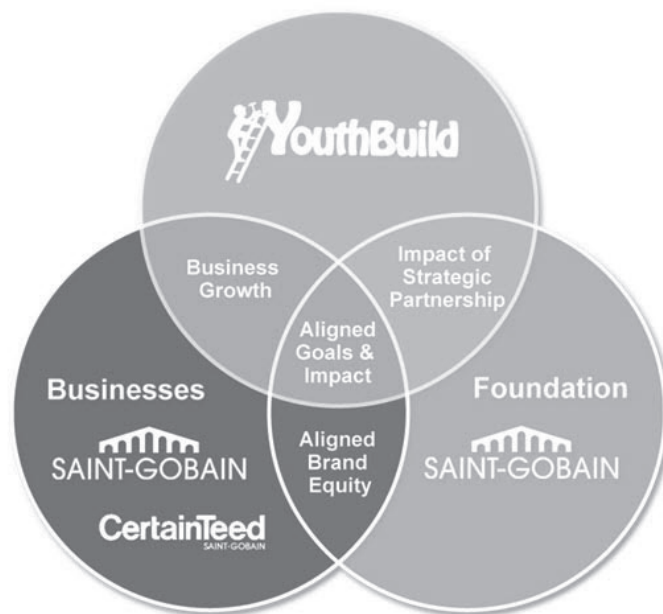
## Making a Change

Change is usually difficult—especially when it comes to tough decisions like which causes your business should support. Saying “no” to a donation request is never easy, but convincing senior leaders of the need to change can sometimes prove hardest.

In this case, the company knew it had to recalibrate its CSR effort to support Saint-

Gobain's business strategy of developing products that enable professionals and communities around the world to construct and renovate comfortable, healthy, cost-efficient and durable buildings. It also knew that a relationship with the right nonprofit could provide geographic focus, build long-term relationships and provide Saint Gobain with opportunities beyond funding. After a rigorous partner evaluation process, it became clear that **YouthBuild USA**, an organization designed to promote green education and job-training programs for disadvantaged youth, was the clear choice.

In December 2010, Saint-Gobain established a national partnership with YouthBuild USA, branded as Building Our Future Together, which has included \$750,000 in grants over the course of four years and sup-





*Organizers at a Building Our Future Together event get volunteers excited about participating in a program that makes the community better.*

port of green home renovation projects in four communities where Saint-Gobain has business concentrations: Akron/Canton, Ohio; Worcester, Mass.; Schenectady, N.Y.; and Philadelphia. In addition to funding from the Saint-Gobain Foundation, the partnership includes a commitment to provide energy-efficient products, building science and technical expertise and employee volunteer support.

The goals of the program include:

1. Engaging youth and communities in green building and environmental stewardship
2. Establishing positive relationships with local communities and government officials
3. Enhancing employee pride
4. Securing quality media coverage that demonstrates how building products can help to transform lives

The program is achieving its goals through non-traditional events and ongoing media

relations surrounding project milestones in the four markets.

### **Impact Beyond Expectations**

All events have student, employee, local community and local and national government involvement. Of note, Senator Kirsten Gillibrand (D-N.Y.), Congressman Paul Tonko (D-N.Y.), the Mayor of Schenectady, the Mayor of Philadelphia and the Director of Sustainability for the City of Philadelphia attended events and made remarks touting the partnership's role in helping to revitalize neighborhoods in the community and assisting cities in reaching their sustainability goals. The hundreds of people who attended these events were able to participate in activities that showed them how making small improvements to their home's sustainability could save them money and create a more

## Lessons Learned

- A CSR program is a means for bringing your organization's brand to life.
- Management will become more supportive of the CSR strategy if it gets the opportunity to personally experience the impact the program is making. When executives are engaged, they become more invested.
- Time invested getting to know a potential partner before formalizing the partnership is time well spent.
- A richer partnership can be achieved when organizations look beyond funding and product. Ask what knowledge can employees share that could support the nonprofit's mission?
- Keep talking to unlock the full potential of the partnership. The more you learn about your partner, the more doors that will open.
- When partnering with a national organization, a targeted, more local approach initially may be best for ensuring the program will be successful on a larger scale.
- Don't be surprised if you get more out of the partnership than you expected.

comfortable, healthy living space.

These events also garnered significant press that included mentions of Saint-Gobain spokespeople and key messages. To date, the effort has secured some 95 unique media stories. Beyond events and their resulting press, there have been national trend stories in *The Washington Post* and *USA Today* that highlight how the partnership is helping expose students to in-demand blue- and white-collar STEM careers.

Now coming to the close of its fourth year, the partnership has completed three homes (two of which are LEED Platinum), enabled eight businesses to donate products, touched more than 1,050 YouthBuild students' lives and enabled hundreds of employees (including executives) to spend more than 750 hours working alongside students to get the projects done. Nationwide, employee reaction has

been positive, with evidence of pride shared online and via email as well as requests to extend the partnership to their respective city and desire to participate in volunteer events.

In the end, though, for Saint-Gobain, the power of its partnership with YouthBuild is about the beauty and the benefit of collaborative economics, of a relationship that delivers dividends in ways that can't readily be seen, in growth at the individual and business level. Instead of being transactional, the relationship is a true value-generating partnership and one of the key ways Saint-Gobain brings its brand to life in North America.

By clearly detailing the processes and practices associated with the program, including detailed measurements, Saint-Gobain was able to package the entire strategy for scaling in other parts of the world. In 2015, the company announced an expansion internationally to support the creation of a YouthBuild school in South Africa and an extension of its national partnership via a three-year, \$600,000 grant, bringing its total contribution in grants over seven years to \$1.3 million.

## Blueprint for Your CSR Program

Organizations looking to create a CSR program can find a lot of lessons from Saint-Gobain's experience. The program has five key components that can be applied to any CSR effort:

1. Identify a social purpose that aligns with your company's core business strategy.
2. Invest the time to select the right partner.
3. Offer support beyond funding.
4. Set measureable objectives.
5. Start a virtuous cycle.

### Identify a Social Purpose That Aligns With Your Company's Core Business Strategy

A CSR program should align with the business strategy of the company or resonate



with what the business does. An organization should identify a social purpose for which it owns part of the solution. In Saint-Gobain's case, it manufactures building products that make a material difference in the way people live their lives, and so it determined the purpose of its CSR program ultimately should be to educate the next generation of construction workers, architects and engineers about building sustainable and environmentally advanced buildings.

### **Spend Time Selecting The Right Partner**

The second most important step in creating a successful CSR program is identifying a nonprofit partner, because few companies can tackle an issue alone. It takes a team, and partnering with the right nonprofit will help build credibility for your program and enable

you to tap into expertise you are unlikely to find in the corporate world.

The right partner is an organization with a similar culture and common values to your own—an organization that already is good at addressing parts of the social issue you've identified but needs help in solving broader issues. Bringing your company's skill set to the table should provide clear and immediate value to the nonprofit and your company.

It's easy to look for partners in the most well known organizations. We'd encourage you to look for hidden gems, though. Being transparent with potential partners during the vetting process about aspirations for the relationship is critical to the future success of the program. Last, talking to companies that have developed partnerships you admire may help you identify the best partner for your organization.



*The Saint Gobain and YouthBuild partnership encourages community engagement, improving the lives of students in the community as well as employees.*

### Offer Support Beyond Funding

Consider what you can offer the nonprofit besides funding. Offering leadership on issues that tap into your employee knowledge base is a clear way to help the partner and engage your workforce.

Saint-Gobain entered into the relationship with YouthBuild knowing full well that its essence was knowledge transfer. It was about teaching students valuable skills, showing them what hard work and tenacity could accomplish. Through volunteer days and design charrettes, Saint-Gobain and its family of companies did something tangible and practical. It put its expert employees alongside students to provide hands-on training in the company's products and share knowledge about how products will help them achieve their sustainability goals for the home and positively impact the end-user.

### Set Measureable Objectives

You might consider tracking funding, number of employees engaged, people touched, hours served, products donated, media placements secured and relationships built. Don't stop there. The real value is found when you ask harder questions, such as:

- How did the program touch peoples' lives?
- How has our corporate culture changed as a result of the partnership?
- What do new and prospective employees think of the partnership?

And finally, keeping stakeholders, such as your company's board, abreast of the program's success is crucial in retaining support.

### Start a Virtuous Cycle

The ultimate measure of success for a CSR program is a relationship with a nonprofit that expands beyond the realm of philanthropy to a true business-driven relationship that starts a virtuous cycle of focused goals, problem solving, innovation and growth for the organizations as well as the customers or communities they serve. We would argue that the better your business does, the more time and money your company has to invest in philanthropy. If you are prepared and focused on your core goals, the relationship can even be leveraged to tackle a real business issue.

Saint-Gobain's largest building materials subsidiary in North America, CertainTeed, was able to address one of the industry's biggest challenges—the dire need for trained insulation contractors. The premise is simple: If contractors have qualified employees who can install insulation, they can take on more jobs and potentially increase the amount of CertainTeed insulation they purchase. The need is a pipeline for talent. That's where the YouthBuild relationship came into play. Though still in the early stages of development, this effort already has led to the hiring of a YouthBuild student at an insulation contractor after the student had completed a CertainTeed training program. **PRN**

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