

15 ways companies can support nonprofit groups without cash contributions

As John D. Rockefeller III wrote, "With the application of a little imagination, there are many possibilities for business to collaborate with nonprofit groups beyond funding." Here, a corporate director of community affairs supplies some ideas.

FRANK KOCH

FOR EVERY DOLLAR corporations donate to nonprofit organizations, it is estimated that they give another dollar's worth of "in-kind" support in the form of goods or services. This is a unique aspect of corporate philanthropy as contrasted with giving by foundations.

This substantial amount of noncash support is possible because corporations have many resources: products; facilities; equipment and supplies; promotional, legal, and financial talent; design and printing services; and so forth.

Nonprofit organizations should realize that a cash gift is not the only type of support that they may obtain from a business organization. If they limit their requests to cash alone, they may be passing up a variety of things that can be as valuable as (or even more valuable than) a cash contribution.

If there is a variety of ways in which a business can help, some kind of support is much more likely. This

permits a nonprofit group to be more flexible in asking for assistance and allows the company greater latitude in deciding specifically how to provide support.

Each company should take an inventory of the resources at its disposal. Furthermore, it might also be a good idea for each community organization to make a complete list of things that it needs so it will not overlook potential assistance from business organizations. What follows is a list of some of the things a company can do.

1. Purchasing power

One day I was visited by a young woman who had done some freelance writing and photography for my company. She said that in organizing a Big Sisters chapter in our area, she had come up with a novel fund-raising idea, but also a snag. Her idea was to produce for sale a handsome calendar featuring dramatic color photographs of San Francisco. She and some other photographers would donate the pictures, and someone else had agreed to donate the design work. She had commitments from several stores to purchase quantities of the calendars for



WHERE HELP IS NEEDED: Many activities, such as those pictured here, can be assisted in numerous ways in addition to financial aid. Left—Teacher works with boy at Palo Alto, California day school. Above—Senior citizens learn gardening techniques. Below—Members of a Resource Center for Women on a "job finding" visit. All these groups have received Syntex Corporation support.



resale to the public. But she couldn't find a printer who would do the job without a large advance payment.

Several days later, I learned that one of our marketing groups was gearing up for an important national meeting. When I asked them if they could use an attractive promotional handout, I got an enthusiastic response. The marketing people agreed to purchase several thousand calendars with the corporate logotype tastefully imprinted on the cover. The company's commitment encouraged the printer to produce the calendars without a cash advance. The whole project, including the commercial sale of the calendars, was carried out successfully. The Big Sisters chapter achieved its fund-raising objective and decided to make the calendar an annual fund-raising project.

2. Employee access

A company can be looked upon as a collection of individual employees. Carrying this concept a bit further, these individuals can be viewed as potential volunteers, advocates, clients, members, or contributors. Some non-profit groups have been aware of this concept for some

time and have taken advantage of it. There are a number of ways this can be accomplished:

1. Informational materials can be supplied by the charitable organization for display on company bulletin boards.
2. Permission can be obtained from some corporations to set up tables in company cafeterias or other locations to inform or solicit employee participation. The League of Women Voters has increased voter registration in this manner.
3. In special cases, payroll deductions may be arranged for some types of appeals, but this procedure is usually restricted to the United Way or similar broad-based campaigns.
4. Arrangements can sometimes be made through the

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company personnel department or employee recreation association to sell tickets to events sponsored by community performing-arts groups and other organizations.

5. If an employee is filling a major role in a community organization, the editor of the company newsletter or magazine might be inclined to write an article on the employee's involvement, bringing the nonprofit organization to the attention of all the firm's employees.

6. In large companies with many employees, voluntary blood donations can be arranged, using mobile units set up on the firm's premises.

3. Surplus equipment and supplies

Companies frequently have surplus equipment and supplies that can be used by nonprofit groups. Often the equipment has been fully depreciated, so the company is prepared to give it away. Community groups needing office furniture or equipment should contact the purchasing agent or office services manager of local firms, especially companies that are moving to a new location or have put up new facilities. This may mean that some office furniture and equipment is being discarded.

Companies that have surplus equipment or supplies can quickly find a community group that will take the material by putting a notice in the classified section of the local newspaper. We once disposed of 5,000 odd-shaped but usable mailing envelopes in this manner.

Surplus or obsolete items that charitable organizations might obtain from businesses include: desks, chairs, tables, typewriters, calculators and other office machines, floor coverings, draperies, lumber and other building materials, tools and shop equipment, laboratory apparatus, paper, envelopes, other office supplies, file cabinets, and lighting fixtures.

4. Publicity help

Just about every nonprofit organization from the community variety to national groups uses newspapers, magazines, radio, and/or television to publicize its activities and to attract financial support, members, and volunteers, as well as to maintain its identity as an effective institution. Except for the major state and national groups, these organizations generally do not have professional public relations or media expertise. Any company that has a public relations department or retains an outside agency can offer free publicity support to nonprofit groups in terms of developing and placing articles or news items in the media.

In 1977 we organized a workshop on public relations, publicity, and communications for the member agencies of the United Way of Santa Clara County. This United Way has about 85 member agencies, and most of them sent staff people or volunteers to attend the one-day workshop in our conference center.

5. Promotional materials and services

Producing and distributing promotional materials are essential activities of most charitable organizations. Corporations have creative talent in their advertising, sales promotion, and public relations departments, including copywriters, photographers, and designers. With these resources, a company can offer to develop a brochure, a poster, or a mailing piece.

Since these services usually don't involve significant out-of-pocket costs, such assistance is normally not costly to the company. The company's creative people enjoy working on something different, and it gives them an opportunity to get involved in a community project. In some of the smaller communities, the high level of creative talent in the company may not be commercially available in the area.

Here are two examples of creative services provided by our firm:

- Preparing the copy for a brochure distributed by a children's healthcare organization to acquaint the public and referral agencies with the diagnostic and treatment services offered by the organization, and to assist in fund raising and in the recruitment of volunteers.
- Designing a brochure for a nonprofit minority employment service. The brochure was printed by another local company, Hewlett-Packard Corporation. Its distribution increased awareness of the employment service within the minority community as well as in the business community. It gave strong impetus to fund raising efforts and increased the number of applicants seeking employment counseling and placement.

6. Printing services

Some large firms have their own in-house printing facilities, which could produce mailers, posters, brochures, and other types of materials for community organizations.

The cost of doing this in the company print shop is usually less than the same job done by a commercial printer. Say a community group gets a \$100 estimate from a local commercial printer and asks for a donation from the

company to cover the cost. If the company print shop can do the job for \$75, it makes more sense to donate the printing than to make a cash contribution.

A potential benefit to the company is that most community groups are usually delighted to give credit for the donation right in the printed piece: "This brochure printed as a community service by XYZ Corporation." This message reaches all the people reading the printed material and is an effective and long-lasting public relations message for the company.

Usually the company print shop cannot meet the same deadlines as commercial printers. The community group should contact the company well in advance of the date on which it needs the printed material. This will give the company time to evaluate the request, to determine if the print shop can fit the project into its working schedule, and to obtain an estimate of the in-house cost of printing the item.

Obviously, if the company's estimate is higher than an estimate by a reliable commercial printer, it would be better to offer to contribute the funds to have the work done outside. Even in this case, however, it is usually possible to have the company obtain credit by requesting a line in the printed item: "Cost of printing donated by XYZ Corporation."

It is remarkable how many printed pieces are used by nonprofit groups. Here is a list of some items printed by our company:

1. One issue of a 16-page newsletter and calendar, "West Coast Dance," published and distributed by a regional dance organization. Editorial costs of the publication were covered by a grant from the California Arts Commission.

2. A brochure for a nonprofit organization dedicated to helping unemployed professionals get back to work as productive members of society. It was used to recruit individuals in need of its counseling and related services and to obtain the support of employers and government agencies.

3. A brochure distributed by a county arts council to acquaint the public with the instructional and artistic programs available in the county and to solicit individual and business memberships.

4. A public relations brochure for a mental health organization that provides diagnostic and treatment services to those disabled by mental retardation, epilepsy, cerebral palsy, and other neurological handicaps.

5. A large poster-mailer for a community environmental group working to maintain open space in the foothills of the Santa Cruz mountains in northern California. The

poster-mailer was the principal element in a campaign to increase the membership of the organization.

6. An eight-page coloring book used by environmental volunteers to develop student ecological awareness in the elementary schools of the community. The books were sold for one dollar each, and the funds were used to cover the administrative costs of the program.

7. Mailing services

Some companies have office service departments that can handle large third-class mailings. This can help organizations make a broad appeal through the mails.

8. Products

Companies that manufacture consumer products can provide useful items to charitable organizations to be used as prizes or giveaways at special meetings or fund-raising events. The visibility of this type of "in-kind" support is high, and the company's support is direct.

9. Fund raising

Corporate executives are generally familiar with fund raising. They also usually have good contacts in other corporations and in the communities where they live. Sometimes they know prominent people who serve on foundation boards. An executive's contribution as a fund raiser may be the best contribution that the community group can ask for.

10. Loaned executives

The United Way has depended substantially on loaned business executives for its campaign talent. This approach has worked well for several reasons. The United Way cannot afford to maintain a large professional staff, which would be used only in the several active months of the campaign each year. Large companies can sometimes afford to loan a talented executive for the period of the campaign. Not only does this provide added talent and leadership to the campaign, but it promotes communication between the organization and the participating companies.

11. Financial services

All nonprofit groups have to set up a system to maintain their financial records. This system can be simple or

complex, depending upon the size of the organization, the size of the staff, and the reporting requirements of federal and or state agencies. Most companies have a financial department that could offer some professional assistance in this area.

12. Legal and tax services

Many laws and regulations covering nonprofit organizations are being proposed and implemented on federal, state, and local levels. These rules affect ways of soliciting gifts, impose restrictions on lobbying activity, tax status, and so forth. Although companies are not nonprofit (by design anyhow) and company attorneys are not usually experts in the nonprofit field, they can usually provide some assistance even if it is only to refer the organization to an attorney who is familiar with these laws and regulations.

13. Loan money

In some situations it is more appropriate for a company to consider a loan than an outright contribution. Occasionally, a nonprofit organization that receives government or foundation funding finds itself between grants or is short of cash for some other reason. If the company can be assured that the regular funds will be forthcoming, it could make a short-term, low-interest loan. One word of caution: Don't make any loan that you can't afford to write off as a bad debt or a contribution if things don't work out as planned.

14. Company facilities

If a company has facilities for meetings, it can offer the use of its auditorium or conference rooms to local groups. Depending upon the company's preferences, it can do this on a regular basis or limit such activity to special meetings, fund-raising events, and so forth. Nonprofit groups generally do not have facilities for holding large membership meetings or special events. Sometimes they don't even have adequate facilities for staff or board meetings. If a company can provide these facilities, it is offering a worthwhile service that will result in greater involvement of the company and its employees with many fine community organizations.

At Syntex, the use of company facilities has played a major role in the company's community relations since the early 1970s. At that time, the company opened a major complex of new facilities in Palo Alto, California, that included a conference center and a food-service facil-

ity. The center has a 150-seat auditorium, six conference rooms of varying sizes, and a large reception area. Before the center was opened, it was decided to make the conference center available to community organizations when not scheduled for company use.

Although the facilities are extensively used by company groups for meetings and conferences, it has been possible to accommodate the needs of many outside organizations. Most company usage is during normal working hours, while community groups have their meetings and events in the evenings or on weekends. During 1977, outside organizations used these company facilities for 103 meetings involving almost 8,000 people.

The meetings and events that have taken place in these facilities have included a community child-care conference, a meeting of city housing officials, an affirmative action conference, a community-college film series, a meeting of industrial nurses, a session of the county human relations commission, a flower and garden show, a symphony fund-raising event, a high-school PTA program, a hospital staff meeting, a Little League luncheon, and a fund-raising event for a state environmental organization.

This direct involvement in community meetings and events elicited many favorable reactions.

One continuing use of our facilities began in 1976, when we were approached by Foothill Junior College in neighboring Los Altos Hills to make its educational services more widely available to the community. It was instituting a number of classes to be held at off-campus locations throughout the school district, including other public buildings, businesses, and churches.

Our training specialist, Roy Blitzer, got management's approval to try the idea, and he selected nine business, guidance, language, statistical, and chemistry courses that might be of interest to our employees, although the courses were open to all in the community. The program was a success and was repeated in 1977 with two new courses added—biology and word processing—and three discontinued.

15. Provide land for a garden

With the increasing cost of food and a renewed interest in gardening, companies with vacant land can do a good turn for their employees and neighbors. The firm can set aside some of its open land for a vegetable garden. This doesn't have to be a large parcel, particularly if the gardeners use some of the intensive gardening techniques that require very little growing area to produce a lot of vegetables.