



Corporate social responsibility

The term 'corporate social responsibility' (CSR) refers to ethical, legal and philanthropic behaviour in the workplace, market and community. Respect for employees, the community and environment is thus central to CSR. However this is always observed with corporate profitability as the overriding objective. At its best, CSR should bolster a corporate's status and contribute lasting value to its shareholders as well as to society at large.

Many CSR initiatives are designed to meet a genuine need in the community. Through various undertakings companies pursue economic, social and environmental goals. Charities can benefit from tapping into the CSR agenda, by identifying a company who would make a good partner, seizing different CSR initiatives and developing corporate partnerships.

Types of CSR initiatives

- Socially aware policies and practices in the workplace.
- Cash donations.
- Employee skill-sharing and volunteering.
- Donations in-kind.
- Cause-related marketing, lobbying and campaigning.
- Sponsorship programmes.
- Community training programmes.
- Ethics and compliance programmes.
- Environmental initiatives.
- Efforts at increasing diversity.

Advantages of CSR for charities

- Increased awareness of the charity and its cause.
- Improved community relations and involvement.
- Corporate contribution to long-term fundraising.
- Company input and expertise.
- Help in-kind (donations or loans of equipment, facilities or training) and/or in-time (volunteers or staff on secondment working with your organisation).
- Possibility of fostering a long-term partnership between the charity and the corporate.

Potential disadvantages of CSR for charities

- CSR can be mere corporate jargon and politically correct box-ticking, rather than a commitment to concrete action. In such cases the benefits for the charity may be superficial at best.
- The charity's reputation may risk being tarnished by association with particular corporates.
- Lack of equality or even exploitation within the partnership. Some companies, for example, stand accused of promoting an initiative more for their own benefit, to enhance credibility or profit, rather than to aid a charity or the community.
- CSR is likely to be one of many initiatives embarked upon by a company. Depending on the priorities of those responsible it may be the case that CSR is a lower priority for the corporate than it is for your organisation. You should, therefore, be wary of the risk of becoming overly reliant on a corporate body. However much you benefit from a company's input, you should seek to maintain your charity's independence.

CSR and communications

CSR initiatives can throw up problems for public relations and internal communications. Your organisation should communicate to its stakeholders how you do business with a corporation



and how you benefit from CSR. Ensure that your messages reinforce the charity's position and values. Emphasise that the relationship is a partnership and the difference it makes to your organisation.

Before entering into a relationship

- Ensure that you engage with a suitable corporate.
- Agree explicitly upon the terms of your relationship. Define the focus of the partnership and make provisions to measure and evaluate your progress.

During the relationship

- Communicate the nature of your partnership to all staff and key stakeholders through tools such as employee involvement materials, joint publications and a partnership logo.
- The media may pay particular attention to relationships with certain companies, particularly where a project or the issue it deals with appear controversial. Prepare statements to issue to the media which make known the nature of your partnership.
- Seek to gain maximum benefits for your organisation from a company's assets. Present the relationship as an investment to all those concerned.

If things go wrong

The potential always exists for a charity's partnership with a corporate to encounter certain pitfalls. Under some circumstances, for example, a charity might acquire a negative image as a result of corporate wrongdoing.

- Should a corporate act in any way that is detrimental to your charity you must be prepared to respond quickly.
- If you have a crisis management plan, include some possible worst-case scenarios for your relationship with the company.

Resources

A wide range of resources and publications is available to help your charity connect with socially responsible corporate bodies. Various organisations are dedicated to matching corporates with charities. Others seek to encourage and inspire new businesses to volunteer their resources and support. Consult the sites below for further information on CSR:

www.accountability.org.uk
www.bconnections.org.uk
www.bitc.org.uk
www.business-impact.org
www.corporate-citizenship.co.uk
www.csreurope.org
www.forumforthefuture.org.uk
www.getethical.com/social/strategy.html
www.inkinddirect.org
www.ibe.org.uk
www.smartchange.org
www.societyandbusiness.gov.uk
www.conference-board.org