

Submittable 

LAUNCH AND SCALE YOUR 

Corporate Social Responsibility Program



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Becoming a Force for Good

From individuals to large corporations, most everyone in this day and age understands themselves to be part of a larger community. With that interconnectedness comes an inherent responsibility to be a force for good. Though many businesses embrace this idea in theory, when it comes to taking the next step, some get stuck. Giving strategically and impactfully isn't easy. In fact, it takes a strong commitment. Corporations that write checks to charities without a thoughtful plan and process are likely being wasteful—not to mention losing out on big opportunities.

The good news is that if your organization is committed to supporting local communities and nonprofits through a smart and streamlined corporate giving program, you can make a big impact while also boosting your brand, improving employee engagement, and strengthening your relationship with clients and customers.



What is corporate social responsibility (CSR)?

Also known as corporate citizenship or community relations programs, CSR programs blend philanthropy and marketing strategy, connecting business and community in meaningful and mutually beneficial ways. At the heart of a good CSR program is social consciousness around your impact on groups, businesses, and individuals in your community.

- Today, many consumers prefer to buy from companies that are
- making a positive difference in the world—and those numbers



are only growing. Given the choice between buying dog food from a company that supports your local humane society and seems to genuinely care about dogs, and one that doesn't, the choice is easy. Research even suggests that most people would pay more for the same product to ensure [they're buying from a socially responsible company](#).

Additionally, due to growing concerns over environmental, social justice, and humanitarian issues, more and more organizations have launched initiatives focused on giving back—in their communities and beyond. The rise of corporate service and giving campaigns indicates that brands are realizing that their contributions can have a substantial impact. And not only is corporate giving a responsible and ethical practice, but it can improve employee morale, boost community quality of life, and inspire customer loyalty.

These days, [CSR is primarily an umbrella concept](#), encompassing everything from climate resilience initiatives and brand activism to important programs focused on diversity, ethical supply chains, and inclusion in the workplace.

Types of corporate giving



Matching gifts

A company matches (or doubles or triples) the amount that their employees contribute to a cause



Employee grant stipends

Corporations give employees funds to donate to an organization of their choice



Volunteer support initiatives

Corporate employees donate time and specialized support to non-profits



Relief funds

A company provides rapid relief for a community or individual in crisis by awarding grants to those in need



Volunteer grants

Employees contribute a certain number of hours to an organization and their employer gives a corresponding monetary donation



Community grants

Organizations apply to corporations for a direct donation to support community programs



Corporate sponsorships

Corporations donate funds toward the cost of a specific activity or event in exchange for publicity of some sort



Scholarships and fellowships

Corporations support students and artists by providing funding for tuition, supplies, and living expenses

More executives are examining what effective corporate citizenship looks (and acts) like on a wider scale. For example, beyond just creating value for their brands, companies are also considering [how they account for the environmental and social impacts](#) of

their work—and CSR is a major part of the equation. Paired with CSR's positive internal effects on a corporation, companies of all sizes recognize the value of engaging in community relations and philanthropy.

Really, when it comes to CSR, the big question for companies is no longer why or when but *how*.

The benefits of a strong CSR program

When you're focused on growing your business, you can easily get lost in the numbers, from profits and margins to sales totals and sticker prices. However, you'll want to remember that while growth is measured in numbers, it's fueled by people. Growth is more than how much you're making or how recognizable your logo is—it's also the impact you have on your community.

Your customers aren't simply numbers on a page. They're people with lives, families, friends, hopes, dreams, fears, and tangible needs. All of these items factor into their decision-making processes, including what they buy and who they buy it from. If you want to build trust and earn their business, you need to treat customers like people and show you value the wellbeing of their communities—a strong corporate social responsibility program is a great way to do this. Understanding your business's values and ultimate goals is essential. What does true success look like for your company?

If your organization has resources to dedicate to your community, you have the opportunity to make positive change. In addition to the good you can do in the world, consider the many benefits that come from [making a social impact](#). Mounting research

establishes that strategic CSR initiatives:

- Build a positive reputation for your business
- Increase brand recognition
- Drive sales
- Improve customer loyalty
- Boost employee morale and retention
- Encourage investments

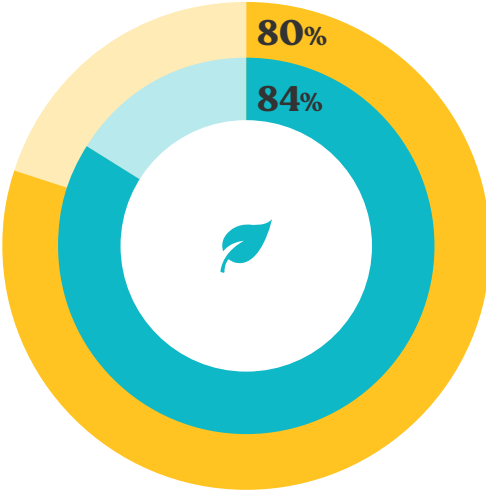
Organizations looking to stay competitive are incorporating CSR into their core brand. In just a few years, CSR has risen from a low-level marketing initiative to a [core component of many businesses' missions](#).

Plus, modern consumers are savvier than ever. They want to do business with companies that are socially conscious and socially active. And they've got the tools to find and engage with businesses that are taking CSR seriously, from supply chain sourcing practices to internal pay equity standards. Frameworks such as environmental, social, and governance (ESG) standards give consumers a new way to understand and measure a company's alignment with their own values.

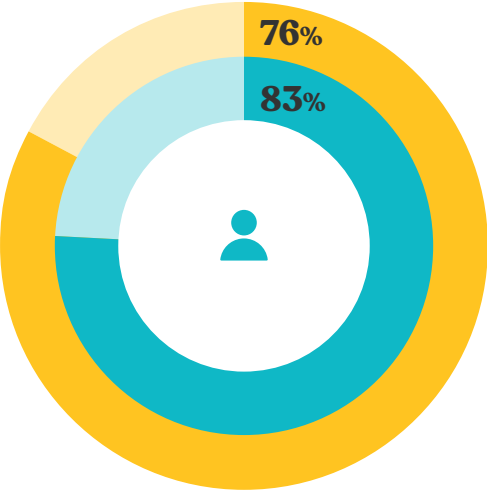


ESG commitments are driving consumer purchases and employee engagement

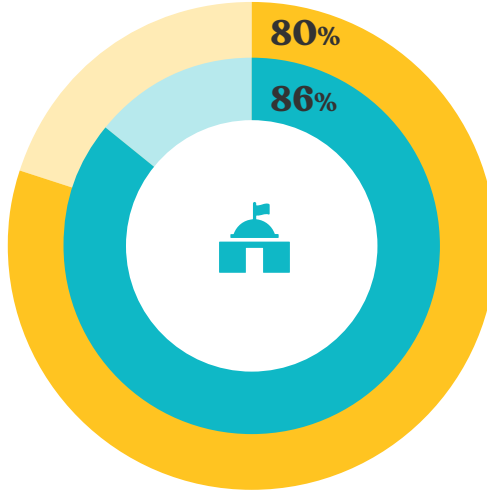
I am more likely to buy from/work for a company that stands for...



ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY



SOCIAL GOOD



RESPONSIBLE GOVERNANCE

Consumers Employees

Q: Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements.

Consumers (n=5,005) | Employees (n=2,510) Source: PwC Consumer Intelligence Series June 2, 2021



CSR is much bigger than a photo op. With the [rise of B Corps](#) and savvy consumers who can sniff out [the difference between meaningful CSR programs and marketing ploys](#), companies are making CSR a strategic priority more than an afterthought. At the same time, the expectations for companies and their CSR programs are rising as are the opportunities for real impact.

Whether we're talking about environmental leadership in procurement practices and ethical labor practices or philanthropic giving to nonprofits and organized volunteering opportunities, companies are stepping up their CSR game and redefining how it works in practice.

Once you've built the basic foundation of your CSR approach and are on the ground running, you have the ability to dig deeper and consider your strategy, both to improve your brand identity and to maximize your impact. Let's look at the trends currently shaping CSR as well as the strategies and tools companies are leveraging to build a winning CSR strategy.





• CSR trends to watch

As you build your CSR program, you want to tap into existing and emerging trends in the field. The global crises of 2020 and 2021 have reshaped the landscape of CSR. With a new urgency around the climate crisis, healthcare, and racial justice, priorities are shifting. Plus many companies and customers now recognize that the social issues they care about are interdependent. These complex problems require [broader solutions](#).

New trends aim to empower communities in need and make access to resources as easy and simple as possible. With investors stepping up to signal their interest in the ways that companies engage with ESG factors, CSR matured significantly in the past year.

★ Top CSR Trends in 2021

- ✔ A new focus on flexibility and inclusivity
- ✔ Transparency becomes the standard
- ✔ A stronger voice for grassroots organizations
- ✔ Increased employee involvement
- ✔ Prioritizing ease of access for communities in need
- ✔ Leveraging technology to maximize impact
- ✔ A greater commitment to global goals
- ✔ Deeper investment in supply chain analysis and innovation

Moving forward, many of the anticipated top trends will allow companies to have an even greater impact. With stronger voices, more local, grassroots organizations will have a say in how CSR campaigns engage the community. A stronger emphasis on more eco-friendly supply chains and sustainable procurement will likely dominate. Technology will make processes faster and easier to set up and maintain. And companies will have to learn [how to talk to an increasingly skeptical public](#).

So what do all these mean when it comes to shaping your CSR strategy? In short, a successful CSR strategy should internalize these trends and execute based on what they mean for your company and its unique CSR priorities. And modern companies can't afford to ignore the trends shaping CSR because the consumers they're looking to court are the ones shaping these trends. The companies that align their CSR strategy to the social impact priorities of their target market will (increasingly) win over a larger share of their target markets.

Sit down with your team and analyze these trends while you develop your [CSR strategy](#). Now, let's break down the steps you should take for building your winning CSR initiative from start to finish.



The nitty-gritty of building your CSR strategy

9 steps to build a successful CSR strategy



Research thoroughly



Link to company values



Build from your customers' priorities



Develop employee buy-in



Connect with community leaders



Engage with existing local initiatives



Execute your program with transparency and flexibility



Reflect on the process



Use your results to improve

1 Research thoroughly

Before you engage in community-based work, make sure you've done your homework.

- **Assess community needs.** What challenges are community members and organizations facing? Where are the areas of greatest or most immediate need?
- **Poll your customers.** What do your customers want your brand to address, and do they know what you're already addressing? Do you have a strong understanding of the gaps that your customers perceive when it comes to your brand and its stances/actions on areas of social impact?
- **Survey your team and community leaders.** What differences and similarities are you finding between your senior management and local community leaders when it comes to CSR priorities? Which causes do your employees actively support?
- **Analyze your own landscape.** What socially-oriented actions and positions has your company taken over the past few years in the realm of CSR? What were the results? Were your brand promises kept?
- **Assess your capacity.** What internal resources can be leveraged to effectively execute a CSR campaign? Which external stakeholders can be enlisted to support your CSR goals?

Every CSR campaign should be grounded in strong knowledge of and collaboration with the community you're looking to serve.

Internally, determine the purpose of your CSR program as it relates to the projected impact you wish to have on society.



2 Link to company values

All of your CSR work should be rooted in your company values. Which social causes are a natural fit for your company given its values and market position? What level of salience do these causes carry today?

If your CSR strategy is not values-aligned, you're risking your brand identity. You must also ensure that the values you support in your CSR initiative are reflected in your company practices. For instance, if you are supporting a river cleanup program, but your business operations are known for polluting, customers will be quick to [point out the hypocrisy](#).

When prepping your CSR strategy, **create a values-driven strategy map** that explicitly links your CSR activities back to those values. That way, you can be very intentional and explicit in the projects you select and how you communicate your impact.

3 Build from your customers' priorities

Once you've asked your customers what they care about, it had better show up in your CSR strategy. Don't seek feedback, then ignore it. That's a surefire way to lose customers.

Be transparent about the results you get from your customer base. They'd probably like to hear their priorities reflected back to them in reporting that shows you're listening to them and, more importantly, **make their social impact agenda the centerpiece of your CSR strategy**.

4 Develop employee buy-in

Your CSR strategy doesn't move without your employees. This starts with determining your employees' preferred social causes and using that information to help build your overall strategy. They want to see themselves reflected in the CSR work you'll be asking them to support. Without that buy-in, it'll be hard to execute any CSR program.

Be sure to go beyond just a one-time survey, but actually **enlist your staff in developing the strategy from the start**. Allow them to define how the company values show up in your CSR work, to connect directly with customers about CSR, and to build strong internal teams that will execute the strategy. Remember, your employees are the lifeblood of your overall CSR approach.

5 Connect with community leaders

Armed with that internal support, you can begin building relationships with community leaders and organizations to partner with in your CSR campaign.

They'll likely know the lay of the land better than your team and frankly, you'll need their support and collaboration to achieve your CSR goals. Making these connections is essential. These leaders can have a strong knowledge base, a trusted relationship with community members, and can offer guidance about what works and what doesn't when it comes to your CSR program.

This is often where many companies get tripped up. They fail to build a strong team *outside* of their offices. But you can avoid this by **engaging with local stakeholders early and often** as you build and execute your CSR strategy. By trusting the wisdom of local leaders and community members, you'll end up with a better CSR approach that's informed by the lived experiences of those you're looking to support. It's just that simple.

6 Engage with existing local initiatives

It's important to remember that there's already good work going on in the communities you're looking to empower. It started before you arrived. Entering into CSR work with an [asset-based lens](#) is a crucial and research-backed approach that yields better results for your program and the communities you're serving.

In practice, this looks like scanning the neighborhoods you're looking to work in and building relationships with the organizations already there addressing the issues that mean so much to your customers and employees.

What you'll likely find is a strong network of dedicated community members. Their strengths will serve your CSR program well and enhance the impact you're able to achieve in partnership with these communities. Don't overlook what it means to build an alliance with these folks.

7 Execute your program with transparency and flexibility

Execution is where all of your preparation and relationship-building pays off. Whether you're tackling health disparities in local neighborhoods or running a literacy campaign in partnership with nearby schools, this is where you get to see your big plan in action.

You've done a lot of work on the front end to understand where your company values intersect with customer priorities, employee preferences, and community needs. Part of this work involves balancing all of these separate pieces. Your values and priorities may not always align—the biggest challenge here is *clearly communicating how you intend to execute on specific values through your CSR program*. Even if certain stakeholders wish for a different approach, they'll likely respect your clarity and intentionality.

Make it an open and active conversation among all parties. When you truly take into account multiple perspectives while shaping your CSR program, you enlist greater numbers in your eventual work and enrich the overall CSR effort.

Before you launch your program, **determine your criteria for success** (and the data you'll collect to verify it). Know how and when you'll measure your impact.

It's a delicate balancing act. You want to stay the course you set while also allowing for some flexibility to adapt as you go. In social impact work, the facts on the ground can change rapidly and you'll need to exercise patience and dexterity with those shifting realities. Just ask the community organizations with whom you're working. They'll tell you.





8 Reflect on the process

Make sure you build in time for reflection as you execute your CSR program. It can be easy to get caught up in the grind of the work itself. Whether it's a monthly all-team meeting or quarterly data check-ins, **create some space for analysis** within your execution strategy.

When it comes to the data, ensure that you're collecting it throughout the project, not just at the end. Set up clear data collection checkpoints and hold your team accountable for gathering the relevant stats you'll need to measure your impact. Remember, numbers are not the full story. Alongside quantitative data, make sure to gather qualitative data as well. This can be statements from members of the community or narratives about the work your program empowered.

Measurement isn't a destination, it's a journey. **Having interim points of analysis throughout the campaign** will help you execute better during your CSR work while also informing your overall strategic approach.

Be sure to listen as you go. Check in with your team regularly and with community members—especially those served by your

CSR project—to see how the CSR work is landing for them. And don't forget to celebrate progress. Give your team shout outs for small victories along the way. Keep the whole company updated on results as they come in and invite stakeholders out to see the work, even if they're not directly involved in the project.



9 Use your results to improve

When your program wraps up, you're not actually done. Prioritize sharing your results. You're on the hook to communicate your outcomes with multiple parties. First off, your employees will want to hear how it went. Empower your internal CSR team to lead this conversation. They're the ones who did the work, they deserve the glory.

You'll also need to have some frank conversations with the local community members and organizations you collaborated with about what impact you did or didn't achieve through your work together. This can be one of the hardest parts of any CSR engagement because people will expect a lot of your company. Enter into these conversations with humility and a commitment to continuing the work.



Lastly, don't neglect to **report out how your CSR initiative went** to other companies and the broader public. Think of this as a way to keep your own team accountable while also spreading your impact more broadly. By informing other players in the CSR sector how your project went, you can positively influence other initiatives to prevent mistakes and improve their approaches. **Communicating your impact helps others make an even bigger impact.**

Your customers also want to hear about your CSR work. Whether you regularly update your website with facts and figures from

your CSR efforts or share photos and videos on social media, make sure you're maximizing the brand benefits of publicizing your corporate giving.

In other words, don't be shy about playing show and tell when it comes to your CSR work. But be mindful of your tone. Customers want to support brands that are truly committed to bettering the community. They do not want to feel like your CSR campaign is little more than a marketing strategy. Ensure your messaging centers the community and is grounded in humility.

Leveraging the right tools for your CSR initiatives

As the expectations for companies involved in CSR work continue to rise, so do the stakes.

CSR programs are increasingly complex and it's important to give your team the best possible tools to organize and execute a winning CSR strategy. Submittable is a [social impact platform](#) that allows your team to significantly

reduce the time and resources it takes to run a top-notch CSR initiative.

Whether you're distributing in-kind donations to nonprofits, funding grants, or sponsoring local events in the community, you need a tool that puts your CSR work in one centralized place. Submittable is here to help. Find out more today.

Submittable

Submittable is a social impact platform that makes it easy to launch, manage, and measure any kind of social impact program. Since 2010, Submittable has helped organizations collect nearly 20 million applications for thousands of customers all over the world.

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