



TCC Group . Corporate Services Corporate Community Involvement and Evaluation

EVALUATION AS A TOOL TO MAXIMIZE BUSINESS AND SOCIAL IMPACT

Increasingly, Corporate Community Involvement (CCI) professionals are being asked by company leaders to explain how their programs and activities are not only impacting the community, but also providing benefits to the business. However, in many corporations, those impacts are not being measured, and CCI staff lack the information they need to articulate the value of their work both internally and externally. As a result, community involvement programs are often criticized for not contributing adequately to business goals, and the function is often marginalized.

Many CCI departments have not developed the proper framework and do not have the tools to clearly measure the social or business impact of their programs, especially beyond counting the number of people served, hours of volunteer service, dollars donated, etc. When CCI professionals do evaluate whether their work is having an effect on the community, the findings often validate their social goals but don't tell companies what they often want to know: did it help the business?

With the right evaluation approach, evaluation information can capture results and:

- Help improve reputation among key internal and external stakeholders;
- Integrate CCI into the business; and
- Ultimately, enhance both the business and the community.

Developing an effective evaluation framework and process can help define and clarify the social benefits of a CCI program. It also helps companies collect the types of information, data and stories that distinguish them from the competition and can be utilized by other departments to support business goals and objectives. With high quality evaluation findings and a formalized strategy for working with all relevant departments to use these findings, a CCI unit can play a more integral role in the business.

When evaluation is built into the planning process, and evaluation frameworks are used to determine strategies to achieve short and long-term outcomes for both the community and the business, CCI programs have the potential to significantly increase impact. Furthermore, if key stakeholders from different departments within the company (such as marketing, communications, government/public relations, HR) provide input in the development of those expected outcomes and strategies, they will begin to understand the business benefits of the CCI programs and how the outcomes can be aligned with their own efforts. Moreover, by working with others inside the company to develop strategies, the goals of the CCI department are more fully integrated with the business goals in other areas, such as employee morale, recruitment and retention, corporate positioning, reputation, brand awareness, and outreach to key audiences.

How can a CCI professional get started with evaluation planning? The following are some initial steps:

Step 1 - Identify and Engage Key Internal Stakeholders

The first step entails determining which departments and business units can benefit from helping to shape and stay involved with CCI programs. Does HR understand the potential benefits for employee retention and recruitment? Does marketing know which constituencies are being reached through the CCI programs? Is the advertising department looking for corporate citizenship stories that can be used to position the company? Who are the business units trying to reach in their regions? Internal players should be involved up front to help answer these questions.



Step 2 - Develop the Logic Model

Once key stakeholders are identified, the group should be convened to assist in the development of a logic model. (For more information on logic models go to www.tccgrp.com/pdfs/LearningAsWeGo.pdf.) A logic model is a visual representation of the CCI program; reading from right to left, the logic model defines the impact of the program, the long and short-term outcomes, the outputs, strategies and inputs and resources. The power of the logic model is that it requires everyone to ask questions, seek answers and eventually reach consensus about the goals for the CCI program. That process not only draws in and educates other departments, but it also enables departments to identify how the CCI program can be aligned with their own efforts. The departments "buy in" to the CCI goals, and become an internal supporter of the program, as well as integrate the CCI program into their external communications and outreach.

Step 3 - Create an Evaluation Plan

It is critical to develop a plan and timeline that includes evaluation markers important to other business units (key update dates, dates for final report, etc.). The planning process should be ongoing in nature so other business stakeholders stay invested and connected with the progress of the program. By doing so, they will develop a vested interest in the CCI strategies and investments on a continual basis.

Step 4 - Evaluate Your Social and Business Impact

Aligned with the logic model, develop the appropriate evaluation tools (surveys, interview guides, etc.) and data collection processes and begin implementing the evaluation. Depending on the capacity of your CCI department, a professional evaluator may be needed to help determine the evaluation approach, methods, tools and processes. It is important to have key internal stakeholders play a lead role in the design (prioritizing evaluation questions, data collection methods, etc.), so the outside evaluator must collaborate with the key stakeholders to determine the most effective process for capturing the data and information needed for the evaluation.

Step 5 - Make Use of What You're Learning

This is the most important step since it provides the "how to" for each department using the information. CCI staff can help other departments make use of the information in order to have the greatest possible impact by educating them on the evaluation learnings, packaging the information in user-friendly ways (bullet points, short PowerPoint presentations, annual report, one-page documents, etc.) and providing key stories for the Intranet, etc. CCI staff should also be sure to make the evaluation learning go both ways by sharing the information externally as well with grantees and the field. Externally, CCI staff can share evaluation learnings at conferences, grantee gatherings, one-on-one with grantees, on the Company's website, etc. As with the development of the initial logic model and plan, which engages key internal stakeholders, the CCI department should lead this process, and as a result, will be seen as a more integral part of the business, contributing to long-term impacts for business and the community.

Conclusion

The pressure on companies and CCI units to perform at a higher level, and articulate the value of their work for the community and the business, will only continue to increase. Society is becoming more knowledgeable and demanding, and is expecting companies to play a stronger role in addressing certain social and environmental issues. Using evaluation as a tool to help focus a company's efforts, and define the long-term outcomes, is an effective way to bring benefits to both society and the business.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

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