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Supporting the community through volunteerism is a value more and more companies in the Charlotte region are intentionally including in their workplace culture, and rightly so.

Deloitte’s latest Volunteerism Survey (2017) revealed that 89 percent of employees believe companies sponsoring volunteer activities offer a better overall working environment than companies that don’t.

At Duke Energy, for example, employee volunteerism is a significant part of the company’s passion for giving back through service. Employees give their time for projects across Charlotte including sorting through donated clothing, preparing books for distribution and assembling literacy kits and snack packs for children.

“Community service is an integral part of our purpose to power the lives of our customers and the vitality of our communities,” said Sarah Degnan, lead stakeholder engagement consultant at Duke Energy. “In 2019, our employees and retirees volunteered more than 136,706 hours with more than 1,908 organizations across our seven-state footprint.”

As part of a long-standing partnership, United Way of Central Carolinas coordinates local community service projects for the company during the annual Duke Energy In Action month. Throughout the month-long volunteer initiative, Duke Energy team members volunteer at a diverse group of nonprofit partners in communities including Charlotte.

“Volunteering with United Way enables you to use your time and talent to help make a meaningful impact on your community,” Degnan said. “Their knowledge of community needs and extensive network with local nonprofits makes them a great partner for Duke Energy In Action month.”

**Finding Purpose and Empowerment**

When companies foster a culture of giving back, they create a purpose-filled environment that empowers their employees and brings forth a sense of responsibility. In fact, Deloitte’s Volunteerism Survey showed that two-thirds of employees believe volunteerism provides an improved sense of purpose.

Through hands-on and skills-based workplace volunteer opportunities, employees can see the impact they and the company are having—from improving early education to eliminating hunger to building healthier communities.

At Regions Bank, the spirit of volunteerism is deeply ingrained in company culture. Its mission to make life better and do more for the communities it serves is put into action through “What a Difference a Day Makes,” an initiative that allows associates to take a day off each year to volunteer with an organization of their choice.

Between January 2019 and October 2019, the company’s Charlotte associates logged more than 700 volunteer hours with local organizations, including United Way agency partners that provide education, health and/or financial stability services in the community.

“Our associates are committed to providing their support to empower people and elevate neighborhoods throughout Mecklenburg County by donating their time, talent and resources,” said Tim Monte, market executive for Regions Bank in Charlotte. “Together, we can create meaningful, positive change that makes a lasting impact.”

**Boosting Interpersonal Skills**

As companies provide ongoing opportunities to participate in social responsibility, employees are encouraged to connect socially and engage with others in meaningful actions.

Whether it’s tutoring in an elementary school classroom, beautifying a nearby neighborhood or building new tricycles for children, providing year-round opportunities in the community on an individual and group level contributes to higher employee engagement and boosts interpersonal skills.

At Wells Fargo, employees consistently work to strengthen the community through nonprofit partnerships, local investments and volunteer activities. In 2019, the company’s greater Charlotte team logged nearly 165,000 volunteer hours.

Wells Fargo partners with United Way for many large-scale volunteer events, including the company-wide Days of Caring which include a wide-
range of activities that highlight various community causes and interests. “Company-wide days of service are a great way to build camaraderie, engage with co-workers and colleagues in a meaningful way and learn more about the issues and needs in our community,” said Jay Everett, senior community relations manager at Wells Fargo. “Team members also mention the benefit of meeting people from other areas and how volunteering easily breaks down corporate hierarchy — it’s great networking.”

When team members interact outside of company projects and day-to-day tasks through volunteerism, they’re able to bond across departments and gather around a common cause. Projects provide employees an outlet to cultivate relationships while giving back to the community.

PROVIDING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT
Stepping away from workspaces and into volunteer projects also gives employees a chance to learn new professional skills that can take their careers to the next level.

Deloitte’s latest Impact Survey (2016) indicates that volunteering experience may play a big role in building leadership skills considered to be “must haves” for successful leaders.

Customer service, time management, delegation, listening and analytical skills are just some of the skills gained through volunteering that are transferable to the workplace. Employees also can gain experience in problem-solving, motivation and entrepreneurship.

GreerWalker LLP challenges employees not only to give their time and talents by engaging in community service projects, but also by volunteering as board members and directors with organizations across Charlotte. Employees serve on more than 70 nonprofit boards and committees, including those with multiple United Way agency partners.

“Being visible and active in our community has always been one of our core values,” said Charlie Greer, GreerWalker’s cofounder. “I am proud to see our firm play an active role in making our community a better place.”

RETAILING EMPLOYEES, ATTRACTION NEW HIRE
Companies that rally their employees to volunteer may see added benefits like boosts in morale, workplace atmosphere and brand perception, according to the Deloitte Impact Survey. Employees, especially millennials, who participate in corporate volunteer activities are more likely to be loyal, proud and satisfied, as compared to employees who hardly or never volunteer, the survey showed.

Workplace volunteer programs also can increase interest in the company from potential employees. The Millennial Impact Report’s most recent findings indicate more than half of people consider a company’s support for social causes an important factor in accepting a job offer.

Many companies, therefore, offer team members time to participate in volunteer opportunities during work hours, helping build engagement and strengthen corporate philanthropy efforts.

As part of its 2030 Sustainability Commitments, Trane Technologies is committed to its communities and creating opportunity for all — strengthening economic mobility and bolstering quality of life, including broadening community access to STEM and early education, housing and cooling comfort, food and wellness.

“Trane Technologies partners with organizations like United Way, granting dollars from its charitable foundation and mobilizing its employees to volunteer, benefiting the communities where they live and work,” said Steve Hagood, senior vice president and chief information officer at Trane Technologies. “In 2019, employees volunteered nearly 32,000 hours to support their communities.”

GETTING YOUR EMPLOYEES INVOLVED
There is no better way to create change than to volunteer right where needs are being served daily. Volunteerism is one of the ways United Way brings people together to solve local challenges and build a stronger community.

United Way works with companies to create ongoing engagement opportunities for employees, such as on-site group projects, day-long community service celebrations and customizable volunteer activities for groups of 20-plus employees.

Volunteers looking for a way to put their specialized skills and talents to good use while giving back to the community also can participate in skills-based volunteering, completing tasks like accounting, business consulting, marketing services and more. Not to mention, skills-based volunteering is a great way to network with peers and fine-tune knowledge while making an impact.

United Way also hosts signature events several times during the year to celebrate volunteerism. These large-scale events connect hundreds of employees and community members with projects that serve neighbors in impactful ways.

Each January, more than 1,000 volunteers take part in service projects during the annual MLK Call to Service, which honors Dr. Martin Luther King Jr’s life and legacy of service. Other special events include United Way Volunteer Week in the spring, Live United Day in the summer, Days of Caring in the fall and the Charlotte Playground Build in the fall/spring. These opportunities engage employees and community members in meaningful ways and provide a taste of United Way’s year-round volunteerism.

6 best practices for planning corporate volunteer projects

Group volunteer projects are a great way to build teamwork and support community needs. By putting sufficient care into scheduling and executing these projects, the results for the beneficiary nonprofit agency can be a program boost. But, failure to plan can become a significant resource drain for agencies.

Here are some best practices for planning corporate volunteer projects:

• Do research. Not every agency is equipped to manage groups of volunteers on a regular basis. Some only work with individuals or small groups. Look at the websites of agencies you’re interested in serving to learn what kind of volunteer assistance they need.

• Be transparent. If you’re contacting several nonprofits to check their availability to host your group, let them know you’re just calling around and that you’re not ready to commit to a project. Don’t reserve the same date/time at several agencies and then decide later where you want to go.

• Be specific. Telling an agency that you’d like to volunteer “sometime in May” with “between 10-40 people” is not helpful for project planning. Be as precise as you can when scheduling your volunteer day to ensure a well-managed event.

• Provide resources. Some organizations always have tasks for volunteers, while others need resources to make volunteer projects a success. If you have budgets or other resources available, include that information in the conversation. That might open up additional opportunities.

• Communicate, communicate, communicate. Nonprofit agencies understand better than most that situations can change and adjustments may be necessary. But rescheduling, expanding or scaling down projects takes time. Don’t assume an agency can make on-the-spot adjustments. Communicate changes to your group’s volunteer plans to the nonprofit as soon as you know them.

• Be respectful. Nonprofit agencies work hard to fulfill their missions and welcome help from the business community in their efforts. Treat them as equal partners in creating a great volunteer experience for your group, and both your team and the agency will reap the benefits.
Community engagement is embedded in Ernst & Young’s culture and is integral to how the company builds strong teams, engages employees and lives out its values every day. Being socially responsible takes commitment from all levels throughout the organization, which is why Ernst & Young emphasizes this at all stages of its employees’ careers.

“Ernst & Young’s purpose is building a better working world,” said Malcomb Coley, managing partner for Ernst & Young’s Charlotte office. “Our people share this sense of purpose — it starts with the work we do for clients and extends into the communities where we live and work.”

The annual EY Connect Day is the company’s largest signature volunteer program held on a single day, where Ernst & Young employees in Charlotte and across the Americas are encouraged to lend a helping hand in the community. Since the first EY Connect Day in 2010, Ernst & Young professionals have logged more than 770,000 volunteer hours strengthening communities across the Americas. In 2019, approximately 700 of Ernst & Young’s Charlotte office professionals donated more than 2,700 volunteer hours to 28 different organizations across Mecklenburg County. Beneficiaries of their time and talents included schools, community centers and nonprofits, many of which are United Way agency partners.

Community engagement is an important part of Ernst & Young’s business strategy and is closely aligned with the company’s values and mission.

It’s no surprise to business leaders that engaged employees make better team members. Increasingly, people want to work for companies and organizations that give back to the community.

Businesses that implement a workplace volunteer program give employees a chance to meet like-minded professionals, develop new skills and find meaning and value in helping their neighbors in need. Not to mention there are a plethora of social and mental health benefits employees gain by taking part in meaningful volunteer activities.

For some companies, employee engagement gets a boost with large-scale volunteer initiatives — from quarterly service days to month-long volunteer programs.

With a passion for giving back to the communities they serve, both Ernst & Young and Wells Fargo are two leading companies engaging their employees through unique volunteer experiences.
Wells Fargo creates solutions for stronger communities

As one of the largest employers in Charlotte, with more than 27,500 people living and working in the region, Wells Fargo supports philanthropic efforts that offer innovative, long-term solutions to meet local needs. As announced last year, Wells Fargo’s philanthropic strategy focuses in three areas: housing affordability, small business growth and financial health.

“Our team members are passionate about community engagement and using their skills and resources to help Charlotte thrive,” said Kendall Alley, region bank president for Wells Fargo in Charlotte. “We have team members who are passionate about serving on nonprofits boards, building and repairing homes, tutoring in schools, providing financial literacy and hundreds of other volunteer activities.”

Through a combination of nonprofit partnerships, volunteer activities and local investments, Wells Fargo employees consistently work to strengthen the community. In 2019, the company’s greater Charlotte team logged nearly 165,000 volunteer hours.

The company also introduced its Wells Fargo Community Care Grants program last year, allowing the opportunity for team members who volunteer and/or serve in external leadership positions to qualify for up to $2,000 in grants for eligible charities each year.

Wells Fargo has partnered with United Way for many large-scale volunteer events, including the company-wide Days of Caring which highlight various community causes and interests. These opportunities not only help employees stay engaged and build camaraderie, but also learn more about the needs within their own community. “Volunteering provides different perspectives and can also shine a light on hidden issues,” added Kellie Lofton, who chairs the Charlotte Wells Fargo Volunteers Chapter. “We know that many people who volunteer at one of these hands-on events will continue to volunteer with that nonprofit in the future.”

Volunteerism leads to an engaged workforce

For centuries, the workforce has engaged in after-hours events to relax from a hard day’s work and get to know colleagues on a more personal level. Over time, these events have commonly become known as happy hours.

Seeing the value of a happy hour, employers have morphed this social setting into company-hosted holiday parties, catered workshops, teamwork retreats and more. Each organization is seeing an increase in employee engagement and overall happiness in the workplace.

Still, a study conducted by Deloitte showed that 70 percent of working Americans believe volunteer activities are more likely to boost employee morale than company-sponsored happy hours.

In an effort to re-engage their employees, organizations large and small have revamped their corporate social responsibility (CSR) programs to focus on connecting employees with meaningful ways to make a difference in their community.

For example, when a Harvard University/UC Berkeley study revealed Charlotte-Mecklenburg ranks 50th out of 50 in economic mobility among the largest U.S. cities, the Charlotte community rallied for a solution. Organizations subsequently have found ways to step up and use their collective impact to create positive change.

Companies like Bank of America, Duke Energy and Atrium Health are helping to support our community’s areas of need such as early childhood education, food insecurity and basic needs by incorporating community impact projects into their company culture through hosting onsite volunteer opportunities. These projects are built into meetings, workshops or lunch breaks to allow employees an outlet to give back by assembling STEM learning kits or packing snack packs for local agencies to distribute.

CSR has become so important that Deloitte’s Volunteerism Survey revealed that nearly half of interviewees from the millennial generation will raise the issue of CSR during the interview or hiring process with a potential for-profit employer. Increasingly, rather than salary and benefit packages, millennials are asking about a company’s corporate social responsibility.

With this insight, companies like Salesforce, TIAA and Wells Fargo engage employees through intentional volunteerism. Some one-day, large-scale projects like the Charlotte Playground Build and company-wide volunteer days engage employees during business hours to provide hands-on experiences in the community with their colleagues both inside and outside of their departments.

EnergyUnited is committed to our community and is working hard to address financial hardship due to COVID-19.

During this uncertain time as we deal with the coronavirus, the EnergyUnited Foundation is here to help! The foundation has funding available to provide assistance to individuals in need, and we will carefully consider every application we receive. We are proud to lend a hand to members who need financial assistance and nonprofit organizations anywhere within our 19-county electric service area.

To receive an application for yourself, a neighbor or a nonprofit organization, please email foundation@energyunited.com

An application will be emailed to you within 24 hours.

EnergyUnited.com/giving-back #AllTogether
Meet United Way’s volunteer management team

When it comes to community engagement, companies have the power to bring positive and measurable change to the cities, towns and neighborhoods where they do business.

In addition to providing an opportunity to create lasting impact in local communities, volunteering helps people build new relationships, boost interpersonal skills and gain valuable leadership experience that will have a positive effect on professional development.

Meet United Way of Central Carolinas’ volunteer management team members who are helping companies across the Charlotte region make a difference personally and professionally through volunteering.

**BOB YOUNG**
Director of Volunteer Strategy and Planning, United Way of Central Carolinas

What’s it like helping companies and/or organizations reach their corporate social responsibility goals through volunteerism?

I think United Way’s role in the volunteer space is very interesting. On the one hand, we create projects, events and other service opportunities that almost always benefit nonprofit agencies other than United Way. On the other hand, we direct the volunteer efforts of non-United Way actors, whether individuals or companies. We’re like traffic cops at the intersection of need and resource, helping everybody get to where they need to go.

How have you seen volunteerism change over the years?

I’ve been active in volunteering and volunteer management for almost 20 years. The primary changes I’ve seen are in the areas of recruitment and communication. There are so many online resources available now for agencies to promote their service opportunities and for volunteers to find those projects. In that way, volunteering has never been more accessible. What hasn’t changed is that commitment is the No.1 determinant of effectiveness. If you truly want to make a difference in our community as a volunteer, you need dedication that goes beyond a single project.

What has been your favorite United Way volunteer project or initiative to work on?

Of all the volunteer events I have the good fortune to work on, I think the Charlotte Playground Build is my favorite. It takes a lot of planning, hard work and creativity to put together an event that engages more than 200 volunteers to build a playground for an under-served school in a single day. But I’m lucky to have the support of a veteran planning committee that helps manage the details. Plus, seeing the kids come out to cheer on and thank all the volunteers during the day is incredibly rewarding.

What is your favorite way to give back outside of your role with United Way?

It’s funny, but outside of donating platelets every couple of months, I don’t physically volunteer as much as I used to. There are many causes and nonprofit agencies whose work I feel strongly about, however, so these days I write a lot of checks.

**AUTUMN MCCARVER**
Volunteer Engagement Manager, United Way of Central Carolinas

What’s it like helping companies and/or organizations reach their corporate social responsibility goals through volunteerism?

It’s been really great connecting with corporate partners and seeing how excited and passionate these professionals are towards giving back. Most corporations have been volunteering for a long time, however, for many corporations being able to use the skills they have to make a deep impact is new and exciting. These corporations are making long-lasting impact for many nonprofits.

How have you seen volunteerism change over the years?

When I started in volunteerism 15 years ago, volunteers preferred long-term opportunities where they would stay for years. Now, most volunteers are looking for short-term projects with end dates and deep impact. The big trend right now is skills-based volunteering, where volunteers who have skills and experience in specific fields are paired with an organization to help fulfill professional needs.

What has been your favorite United Way volunteer project or initiative to work on?

My favorite project thus far is the MLK Call to Service. To have so many wonderful volunteers in one place really gives an energy that you cannot always combine in one project.

What is your favorite way to give back outside of your role with United Way?

I am on the board of Youth Outright and I give back wherever possible. I love supporting my community and nonprofits that are working so hard.
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HOW YOU CAN CONTRIBUTE
Aquesta Bank is challenging local and regional businesses to help make Cain Center for the Arts a reality. Aquesta Bank is matching every business contribution of $2,500-$10,000 to The Campaign for Cain Center for the Arts, dollar for dollar, up to $250,000, for a total of $500,000!

Justin Dionne, executive director of the Cain Center for the Arts with Bill Russell, president and CEO of the Lake Norman Chamber of Commerce and Jim Engel, president and CEO of Aquesta Bank.

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cainarts.org/aquesta-challenge
Food Lion feeds the community through support from its associates

With one-in-eight neighbors facing hunger and one-in-six children at risk of food insecurity in the U.S., it takes a village to tackle these issues. So, when Salisbury, N.C.-based Food Lion decided to fight these issues to end hunger in North Carolina and across its 10-state footprint, it had the support from its 63,000 associates leading out on frontline volunteerism efforts.

"Since 1957, Food Lion has been committed to offering fresh food at affordable prices in the communities it serves," said Food Lion President Meg Ham. "But we recognized that many of our neighbors struggled with not having enough to eat and making tough choices between dinner and rent or gas and groceries. We knew we had to be part of the solution."

Enter Food Lion Feeds: established in 2014, the grocer’s hunger-relief initiative partnered with Feeding America and its member food banks to provide more than 500 million meals to neighbors in need. Food Lion associates rallied around the cause, quickly becoming a critical piece to solving the hunger puzzle by volunteering, encouraging customers to support in-store campaigns that help to donate meals and serving as brand ambassadors for the initiative through their own associate giving program. Because of their passion, Food Lion reached its goal nearly 18 months earlier than planned, and then set an ambitious goal of donating 1 billion more meals by 2025.

"At Food Lion, we are the towns and cities we serve and nourishing and caring for our communities is something we are deeply passionate about," said Ham. "I’m very proud of our associates who have embraced and rallied around this effort to care for our neighbors."

Food Lion associates volunteer to fight hunger year-round with a growing list of partners to create lasting change and infrastructure in the towns and cities they serve, including here in Charlotte. Food Lion associates also show their care for their communities during critical moments-in-time where neighbors are most vulnerable to hunger.

For example, the novel coronavirus has recently been deemed a global pandemic impacting communities around the globe. Food Lion quickly shifted efforts to lend support to neighbors in need during this unprecedented time.

This past March, Food Lion associates packed and distributed backpacks of food to 20 local schools in Cabarrus County to support local children who typically receive free or reduced-cost school breakfasts and lunches, but are no longer in school because of the pandemic. Food Lion also donated $1.5 million — the equivalent of 15 million meals — to feed hungry seniors, children and families across their footprint. During this critical time, Food Lion associates continue to do what they can to care for the towns and cities they serve.

In conjunction with Feeding America’s® Hunger Action Month™, Food Lion associates and its community food bank partners fight hunger each September by performing more than $200,000 of renovations to pantries. In 2019, associates restocked 105 feeding agencies. The donation helped feeding agencies to nourish children, veterans and seniors who are facing food insecurity issues.

As the official hunger-relief partner of the Charlotte Hornets, Food Lion associates join the Hornets team every November for the annual Street Turkey event benefiting Second Harvest Food Bank of Metrolina and Loaves and Fishes, donating 500 turkeys to feed local families in 2019.

"Second Harvest Food Bank is so grateful to have partners like the Charlotte Hornets and Food Lion that work with us to ensure that every child, senior and working poor family in our region has enough to eat every single day,” said Second Harvest Food Bank of Metrolina Chief Executive Officer Kay Carter.

Throughout the year, Food Lion associates volunteer for and work with partners in Charlotte, statewide and across Food Lion’s 10-state footprint including Feeding America, United Way, Operation Homefront, No Kid Hungry, Second Harvest Food Bank, Food Finder and American Red Cross.

“At Food Lion, we’re committed to working with our community food bank partners every day of the year, and in significant times of crisis such as the one we are now facing to ensure that we’re doing all we can to care for our neighbors in need,” said Ham. “We are extremely proud to take on this incredibly important mission in an even bigger, more impactful way.”