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Assessing the business benefits of corporate volunteer programs

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**ASSESSING THE BUSINESS BENEFITS OF
CORPORATE VOLUNTEER PROGRAMS**

**A Thesis Presented to
The Faculty of the School of Journalism
and Mass Communications
San Jose State University**

**In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Science**

by Suzanne Allen Valdivia

May, 2000

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ABSTRACT

ASSESSING THE BUSINESS BENEFITS OF CORPORATE VOLUNTEER PROGRAMS

Suzanne Allen Valdivia

This thesis examines Sun Microsystems' corporate volunteer program, using a set of corporate community involvement guidelines developed by the American Leadership Forum of Silicon Valley. This study found that these guidelines do provide a useful framework for volunteer program evaluation, and that aspects of Sun's program are worthy of replication by other companies, but systematic, quantitative evaluation does not appear to be practiced consistently at all levels of the program. This study describes the growing movement in corporate community relations toward more quantitative methods of program assessment and, in absence of formal theory, the increasing advocacy for developing new tools for measuring bottom-line impact. It is hoped that this data will be a catalyst, spurring additional corporate volunteer programs and stronger proof of the resulting business benefits.

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This master's program has spanned three jobs with three generous and understanding bosses. Throughout it, my husband has been kind and supportive, and a great cook on evenings when that really made all the difference. Thanks also to my family for prodding me to finish the program from across the country.

Thank you, finally, to volunteers who uncover potential and highlight humanity in their individual acts.

Every man must decide whether he will walk in the light of creative altruism or the darkness of destructive selfishness. This is the judgment. Life's most persistent question is, "What are you doing for others?" - Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

Although there is little doubt that a company's philanthropic and volunteer activities in the surrounding community add value, that value is much more difficult to quantify than the actual units sold in a quarter, or the rise and fall of the stock price, or the number of billable hours allocated to a specific project. Corporate community relations professionals find themselves in a quandary. In order to utilize the evaluation methods that would best demonstrate their corporate volunteer programs' bottom-line benefits, they would need more time and resources than most departments have. And often, they will not be given a larger budget to acquire those needed resources unless they can demonstrate the program's link to bottom-line value – a classic catch-22.

Benefits of corporate volunteer programs run the gamut, from enhancing employees' skills to improving relationships with local government, and often a single program can meet a number of different business objectives. Some companies have determined that offering volunteer opportunities helps when recruiting new employees. Volunteer programs can also be seen as an actual benefit (like a dental plan or flex-time) that increases employee loyalty and retention, while others like GE Plastics see it as a way to improve employee morale and encourage team building (Weiss, 1991). Most CEOs would acknowledge that a corporate volunteer program enhances the company's reputation, which contributes to better customer relations and ultimately translates to higher sales. But unlike advertising, they may not see how this goodwill halo correlates with increased profits. So if the corporate community relations department is asked to show the bottom-line benefit of the volunteer program, an interesting challenge lies ahead.

Through recent studies and seminars, existing "best practices" in program evaluation are slowly emerging, providing the measurement tools necessary for corporate community relations professionals. In some more enlightened companies, executives may understand the intrinsic value of corporate volunteer programs and may not require a quantitative assessment, as long as the goals set out for the program are being met. Even if these goals are not linked directly to profit, there are definite aspects of these programs that can be measured and evaluated. As companies share their best practices and the knowledge base expands, methods of evaluation are becoming increasingly sophisticated. The question then becomes whether corporate community relations departments actually carry out these evaluations, and if so, do these existing tools effectively measure the benefits of existing corporate community relations programs?

Sun Microsystems, headquartered in Palo Alto, California, has a comprehensive employee volunteer program which incorporates a number of different business objectives into a variety of projects, totaling at least 14,000 volunteer hours annually. Worldwide Corporate Affairs manager Gary Serda asserts that Sun is a corporate role model for several other corporate volunteer programs in Silicon Valley (1998). To understand why the company feels it stands out and to see what criteria Sun is using to judge its own success, the researcher has completed a limited case study of Sun's Corporate Volunteer Program.

The questions this thesis seeks to answer are:

- 1) What are some existing models, guidelines or tools that companies can use to assess the effectiveness of their employee volunteer programs?
- 2) Does Sun's employee volunteer program fit the community involvement program guidelines recommended by the American Leadership Forum - Silicon Valley?
- 3) Is Sun's volunteer program a model that other companies should replicate or are there certain aspects of Sun's program that other companies should replicate?

- 4) What are the business objectives that Sun intends to meet with its corporate volunteer program?
- 5) How does Sun evaluate its progress toward meeting these specific objectives?
- 6) Does the American Leadership Forum - Silicon Valley set of guidelines provide an effective framework for assessment of a company's employee volunteer program?

Sun's volunteer program yields a number of business benefits and Sun's Worldwide Corporate Affairs practitioners must decide *which* business objectives are the most important for their department, and how to assess their progress in each case.

According to Kyle Zitek of Applied Materials Community Affairs department, what actually gets evaluated or measured is determined by which specific objectives a company chooses. What is the company trying to accomplish with the volunteer program that ultimately impacts the bottom-line (K. Zitek, personal communication, April 1998).

Increasingly, corporate community relations professionals are responsible for such volunteer programs (Wild, 1993). To ensure program efficiency, they must conduct the same kind of evaluation their public relations colleagues would use in a campaign — measuring goals and objectives and surveying opinions of key publics (Wilson, 1995). This thesis will provide an overview of the current methods of evaluation in the field and examine which approaches are used by Sun Microsystems. As the trend has moved more toward *strategic* corporate citizenship, we want to understand how Sun's volunteer program fits Sun's business philosophy, and how the company positions that program both internally and externally.

This thesis will also briefly examine the different communication tools Sun uses to promote its volunteer program, both internally to gain employee support, and externally, to build awareness in the community. Does Sun aggressively promote its volunteer efforts in the community or do the employee volunteers' actions speak for themselves?

Why is this research important?

Although quantifying the benefits of a volunteer program may seem like a difficult task, companies must be able to justify using the financial resources required to execute such programs. If the *costs* of staffing the program can be easily quantified, then the *benefits* of the program must be measurable or at least possible to document. Managers must be able to produce some figures to demonstrate Return on Investment (ROI). Or as Dr. Martin Roth, Boston College Center on Corporate Community Relations, explained at a *Program Evaluation for Corporate Citizenship* seminar, "Corporate community relations professionals must share the language and the mentality that senior managers bring to the table" (M. Roth, personal communication, April 15, 1998).

Community relations comprise a significant part of a company's reputation. And genuine, sustained involvement in the surrounding community will likely benefit the company when issues over roads and utilities, zoning and taxes arise (O'Brien, 1997). The community also consists of current and potential customers, another public crucial to a company's success. Corporate community relations practitioners must be prepared to justify their volunteer programs in ways that translate to the bottom-line, by demonstrating the business benefits. But they also need to evaluate the actual impact their programs have on the intended organization, for example how their mentoring has increased reading levels at the local public school. Tracking current community attitudes and assessing impact on the intended organization are two key components in the two-way symmetrical model of public relations, the model used in the highest quality PR programs (Dozier, Grunig & Grunig, 1995). Surveying participating employees, the local community and the non-profit organizations that benefit from the volunteer efforts is critical in maintaining an effective program.

New methods of measurement have emerged out of this need to justify volunteer programs, and that trend will likely continue (Urban, 1997). By conducting an in-depth examination of the Sun Microsystems Volunteer program, as well as a general exploration of existing reports and articles on evaluation of corporate volunteer programs, the researcher hopes to learn new and effective ways to evaluate the benefits, as well as the costs of such programs. These evaluative methods can be shared with other companies as part of the "best practices" literature currently emerging in this field.

The reasons behind the purported success of Sun's volunteer program will be examined, as well as the various business benefits. By comparing aspects of Sun's program against the seven-step Guidelines for Launching a Community Involvement Program (created by the American Leadership Forum of Silicon Valley), we can determine whether Sun's program is in line with current "best practices."

This research may help increase awareness and proliferation of effective corporate volunteer practices and spur additional creative partnerships between for-profit companies and non-profit agencies. The data gathered should provide a framework so that other community relations professionals can assess whether Sun's program is a model that fits their business objectives, as well as their available financial and human resources.

Researcher's Qualifications

In April of 1998, the researcher attended a seminar administered by the Center on Corporate community relations of Boston College. The topic was program evaluation in corporate community relations, and it provided a number of additional resources and contacts that were integrated into this research project. The researcher was also employed in a research capacity for two years at a non-profit organization, The Business Enterprise Trust in Palo Alto, California, which publishes business case studies, produces educational videos and hosts an awards program featuring innovative business

practices that benefit employees, the environment or the community, and also demonstrate a positive impact on the bottom line.

Guidelines for Successful Corporate Volunteer Programs

Although there are not any official standards for corporate community involvement programs, companies including Sun Microsystems are willing to share their best practices. Organizations including The Points of Light Foundation in Washington D.C., the Center on Corporate Community Relations at Boston College, and America's Promise in Alexandria, Virginia, have gathered information from a number of businesses and published it to assist other corporate community relations professionals. For example, Points of Light has created "Principles of Excellence in Community Service." The major A.C.T. guidelines include:

A = Acknowledge that the corporation's community service involvement and its employee volunteer efforts contribute to the achievement of business goals.

C = Commit to establish, support and promote an employee volunteer program that encourages the involvement of every employee, and treat it like any other core business function.

T= Target community service efforts at serious social problems in the community (1998, Points of Light Foundation).

The guidelines were defined in more detail on the website listed above.

The American Leadership Forum of Silicon Valley developed a set of seven criteria needed before *starting* a community involvement program. These same guidelines are being used in this study to assess *existing* programs.

Step 1) Gather Information [get input from various stakeholders]

Step 2) Get Company Wide Commitment [buy-in at different levels; establish a budget; find a program champion]

Step 3) Identify your goals [look at other companies' best practices; narrow issues; make sure goals line up with company philosophy]

Step 4) Develop Criteria for Saying Yes and No [in response to requests from non-profits, develop policies and procedures]

Step 5) Develop a Decision-Making Structure [get employees from different levels involved]

Step 6) Organize and Select programs and projects [narrow the program focus to meet manageable goals]

**.Step 7) Evaluate your efforts
(1997, <http://www.alfsv.org>).**

Using these seven guidelines, we can evaluate existing corporate volunteer programs at a range of companies. For example, the ALFSV guidelines say that top-level support must exist to ensure the program's success. So in Sun's case, by examining speeches, the annual Community Involvement Report, and media interview transcripts, we could assess whether Sun's CEO, Scott McNealy, demonstrates the company's commitment to community involvement in those communications with key publics.

The ALFSV guidelines are available in more detail, including suggestions on facilitating each of the seven steps. For the purposes of this study, the researcher opted to use the major headings from the guidelines as the framework for assessing Sun's volunteer program.

Brief Summary of Methods

For this thesis, the researcher conducted a **single case study** examining the background and policies guiding Sun Microsystems' volunteer program. Because there currently is no universal model for a successful corporate volunteer program, the case study compares aspects of Sun's program against the guidelines developed by the American Leadership Forum of Silicon Valley, located in Los Altos Hills, California. Research efforts focused on identifying the benefits of Sun's program, how they have been evaluated over time, and how they have been communicated to their employees and the general public. The author also wanted to find out the company's prevailing attitude regarding seeking publicity for its volunteer efforts.

The researcher conducted **in-depth interviews** with employees from key positions at Sun Microsystems to learn how their measurement and publicity methods have evolved, and whether their current program is meeting set business objectives. Interviewees included the manager of the Worldwide Corporate Affairs department/executive director of the Sun Foundation, the program manager for education and community development, the Volunteer Center contractor who manages major aspects of the volunteer program, an employee volunteer who focuses on short-term involvement, and one employee who has been involved in a long-term school district project, as well as that school district's director assistant superintendent. In addition, the researcher accessed **documentation** published by the company, including the website, electronic mail messages sent between the Worldwide Corporate Affairs department and Sun volunteers, several Community Investment Reports, media transcripts, and Sun Foundation grant guidelines. The researcher also engaged in **non-participant observation** at an employee volunteer training.

Through this inquiry, the researcher established an overview of current trends in corporate volunteerism and corporate community relations, reviewing literature that identifies key elements of effective programs, determines what benefits result, and describes how these benefits are measured. Since evaluation is an evolving area of research in corporate community relations, this thesis should provide a useful summary of a number of studies in this specific area. But because corporate community relations is not yet a *formal* field of study, a number of studies have been conducted internally at companies around the world and are not readily available in academic libraries. Those publications are available through the Points of Light Foundation and the Boston College Center on Corporate Community Relations, organizations that specialize in researching and promoting best practices in corporate community involvement programs.

Ultimately, the researcher aims to establish whether corporate volunteer programs can provide legitimate, cost efficient business benefits to a company, and whether those benefits can be assessed in a tangible, quantitative way. Using the ALFSV seven-step guidelines as the framework for analysis, and comparing the data collected during the research phase against that framework, the researcher may also determine whether Sun's volunteer program is truly a suitable model for other companies. In addition, it may be determined that the seven guidelines need to be altered or additional guidelines need to be added in order to evaluate a volunteer program effectively.

Assumptions

In preparing for this case study, the researcher assumed that Sun's volunteer program is a respected program, perhaps a leader among high-tech companies because the Worldwide Corporate Affairs department manager had described how Sun's program had been used as a role model for other companies in the area. It was also expected that because Sun claims that aspects of its volunteer program are cutting edge, the company would be willing to share its expertise with peers in business, as well as the researcher. The researcher also anticipated that the complexity of Sun's community involvement program would require a rigorous evaluation, which would likely involve quantifying bottom-line benefits, and that there would be strong links between the bottom-line benefits of the program and Sun's overall business strategy.

Delimitations

This study will explore Sun Microsystems' corporate community involvement programs, but the main focus will be on the corporate volunteer program rather than grantmaking and cash donations. Because there is no apparent model for other companies to adapt, this study seeks to build on existing guidelines and create a model that other companies could be compared with, perhaps in a follow-up multiple case study.

CHAPTER II

Literature Review

In her historical review of trends in U.S. corporate community relations, Danielle Urban (1997) notes that the ongoing debate over a corporation's ultimate responsibility often gets traced to the 1970 Milton Friedman article in the *New York Times Magazine* in which he asserted that the sole responsibility of a business is to earn a profit. It is therefore understandable that a number of corporate volunteer advocates have felt the need to respond to Friedman and demonstrate how such programs contribute to a company's bottom-line. The inherent business benefits of volunteer programs, like improved employee morale and enhancement of a company's reputation, may seem obvious. But management does not always see these programs as directly benefiting the bottom-line (Wild, 1993). Directors of volunteer programs need to be capable of measuring the program's success in terms that make business sense, and because of this, program evaluation is an emerging trend in corporate community involvement. According to Wild, justifying a program's continued existence is usually the responsibility of the human resources or the community relations department (1993) .

Hundreds of books and articles discuss public relations in general, and much has been written on corporate community relations, but the following literature review will focus in on existing research that attempts to 1) identify and then quantify the benefits of corporate volunteerism and to 2) evaluate the success of specific volunteer program objectives. Much of the existing material has been published by companies who have decided to share their best practices. And many of the available articles are from business journals and handbooks developed by organizations that specialize in corporate community relations.

Other works that address the broader issue of a corporation's responsibility to the surrounding community will be discussed cursorily, providing a general overview of corporate community relations, and setting the context for this more specific inquiry into volunteer programs and associated evaluation.

A Plea for Measurement

The American Institute of Certified Public Accountants (AICPA) was calling for better number crunching in the corporate community relations field as far back as 1976. Craig Smith wrote "Desperately Seeking Data," an article which solicited more research showing

how product donations, matching gifts, CEO leadership, grass-roots employee volunteerism, public service ads etc., work together or separately to boost (or hinder) a spectrum of corporate strategies such as marketing, human resources, R&D, etc. Furthermore, studies should show how corporate philanthropy can cut across these functions to make them add up to a larger whole, thereby boosting the bottom-line (Smith, 1993, p.11)

Smith also criticized corporate philanthropy studies for grouping all of a company's socially responsible initiatives together and looking at the aggregate benefit. He suggested that future research depart from narrow case studies and instead compare a number of companies across different corporate philanthropy functions. He also encouraged researchers to determine whether profitable companies have the luxury to become socially responsible or whether a company's community involvement helps determine its profitability – a "chicken and egg" scenario (1993).

Because it has historically been difficult to justify "soft" programs using traditional business methods, some researchers have published papers attempting to *quantify* the financial benefits. In his report *Measure of Consumer Attraction to Socially Responsible Companies*, Richard Barnes lists both corporate philanthropy and volunteerism as key elements of corporate citizenship which have an impact on consumer choices, and ultimately the bottom line.

There is evidence that consumers are "voting with their dollars" and electing to reward companies that reflect the concerns of the consuming public on environmental, educational and other social issues (1995, p.3).

Barnes notes that, while it is logical that a company's community involvement would have a positive impact on financial performance, researchers have struggled to quantify that impact:

Differences in sampling, variables, survey instruments, methodology and measurement as well as **the absence of any theory** to govern the research process, contribute to the conflicting conclusions (1995, p.3).

Corporate community relations has emerged as an area of interest, but as long as there is no major theoretical basis for this area of interest, as Barnes points out, it will never evolve into a formal field of study. The other tension that keeps corporate community relations from fitting neatly into theories is the accepted difficulty in demonstrating a corporate community relations program's impact empirically. In academia, discussion of corporate community relations seems to fall somewhere between the purview of Business Administration and Public Relations.

Distinguishing Social Information

Can a company's overall social impact be measured, whether positive or negative? In a 1976 report titled *The Measurement of Corporate Social Performance*, the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants (AICPA) provides some suggestions. "Due to the expanding role of business in addressing societal needs, companies are faced with community-related challenges and must be able to assess their success in resolving them" (AICPA, 1976, p.3). The data the report recommends gathering is neither part of a *social audit* nor is it a reflection of *social responsibility*. According to AICPA, social information is

intended to relate to the social impact that business actions make on individuals, on groups of individuals called publics, and on the conditions that substantially affect their lives... in such areas as employment, the environment, the design and use of

products, and the conditions in the immediate neighborhood of the corporate facility... (1976, p.6).

Information on Sun's volunteer programs would fit AICPA's definition of *social information* because of the program's impact on "the immediate neighborhood" (which are the communities surrounding Sun's campuses). AICPA explains that the term **corporate responsibility** implies an obligation on the part of the participating company. The business benefits to Sun (skill-building, employee retention) and to the schools near Sun campuses reduces this notion of obligation. Sun's involvement grows instead out of recognizing an intelligent way to serve multiple needs both externally and internally. And because this thesis focuses on the benefits of this particular program within Sun, rather than on the range of social impacts the company has on the environment, on consumers overseas, etc., the material included here is not comprehensive enough to be mistaken for a *social audit*.

If we agree that the information we are gathering is "social information," then we want to understand what information is relevant and how it can be evaluated. AICPA advocates tracking information in four areas related to corporate citizenship: "character espousal; participation in community activities; organizational example; and social mini-programs" (1976, pp.149 - 150). Finally, AICPA recommends that the information gathering be conducted both internally and externally, and that the community relations department share its information with anyone who is interested.

AICPA suggests conducting studies to determine the impact of community involvement. For example, the company should count the number of families who will be displaced if a company road is put through. In Sun's program, counting the total number of public school students who will benefit from a newly installed computer network would be a similarly useful measurement. AICPA also suggests a survey of "citizens" to find out how their impressions of the company are impacted by its

community involvement. Employees should also be surveyed regularly to determine the level of participation in the volunteer program (1976).

Social information enables management to make effective decisions, "to manage the affairs of their company significantly better than they could if it were not available to them" (AICPA, 1976, p.195). AICPA acknowledges that getting managers to review social information before making decisions will be challenging, but it also predicts that "social reports" will

become a regular feature of corporate annual reporting; ... will become more standardized... As techniques for making quantitative measurements improve, an increasing amount of quantified information will be presented. However, some purely verbal descriptions may always be expected... (AICPA, 1976, p.236).

AICPA seems skeptical that social impact can truly be measured effectively but feels that the evaluation process is still valuable. "In most areas, the information available is incomplete, and often inaccurate; usually companies do not and cannot measure social impacts very well nor trace them very far" (1976, p.10). However, AICPA acknowledges that in matters of legal importance or government regulation, information is often accessible and well documented. When this kind of evaluation is required by law, the necessary resources are made available to conduct those evaluations. AICPA concludes that with regard to corporate social impact, it is

pessimistic about expectations that a social information system with even the relative purity of financial accounting systems will be developed in the foreseeable future, if ever. It is optimistic that much can be accomplished and that it will be useful (AICPA, 1976, p.11).

In his book, *Building Your Company's Good Name* (1996), Davis Young explains the advantages of the KeyCorp "Neighbors Make the Difference" program. One afternoon each September, the company shuts down and all 20,000 employees are encouraged to participate in 1,500 different community service projects. They stipulate that these projects must impact relevant markets. According to Young's interview with

the former CEO, "the program touches every employee and brings us closer together. It allows us to actively strengthen the bond between our company, our employees, and the people in the neighborhoods we serve (p.176)." Young elaborates,

In addition to strengthening relationships with its communities, this program has contributed to building a spirit of teamwork among employees, many of whom have come together through mergers. The company's commitment to its program is communicated to all employees, as well as to customers, shareholders and communities (1996, p.176).

He also explains how employees can be "ambassadors" to various stakeholders, including the community, because earning employees' trust and loyalty is at the core of the company's reputation.

While Key Corp's former CEO is quite keen on this model, it raises a few problems regarding measurement and evaluation. Specific goals need to be set for that one afternoon a year, otherwise employees' impact may be less than desired. And if employees volunteer for different charities, the public relations benefits may be spread out over too many organizations and make less of an impression on key publics. In contrast, the goal for GE Plastics' Share to Gain program, is to get the entire workforce to revamp a single community facility in one day. Logically, a sense of pride and accomplishment would result from completing such a mammoth project. And the actual impact on the single benefiting organization (e.g. the YWCA or the homeless shelter) would be much easier to assess. The Key Corps program might involve so many benefiting organizations that it would be too cumbersome to evaluate the perceived aggregate impact.

With the breadth of Sun's volunteer program, hours from some of the smaller scale projects conducted by single employees are never tracked. In addition, no direct feedback regarding those projects is given to Jenny Girard, one of two Volunteer Center employees who has been contracted to manage Sun's volunteer program. But with

Sun's Open Gateways program, in which employee volunteer teams connect a local school to the internet, establish a network, and install brand new equipment, the efforts of these employees *are* carefully tracked. Perhaps it is easier for Sun to measure the focused impact on one school than on multiple organizations being assisted by a range of different employees over time.

A Context for Corporate Volunteerism

Before discussing methods of measurement and specific programs, a brief discussion that defines corporate philanthropy and explores the complexity of a corporation's reputation may be helpful.

A company's volunteer programs usually fall under the umbrella of **corporate philanthropy**. Strategic giving of time and money is increasingly helpful in making inroads to new markets overseas (Smith, 1994). Paul Davis Jones defines strategic philanthropy as "A company's long term investment in an appropriate cause that does measurable good in society while enhancing the company's reputation with key audiences" (Jones, 1997, p.33).

Business leaders are becoming more vocal about the importance of such programs. The former chairman of New England Telephone Co., Paul O'Brien talks about "casting a single shadow" by linking community involvement with the business strategy. Besides, he asserts, "community involvement is no longer a luxury — it's a necessity" (O'Brien, 1997, p.8). Information about such involvement will be of interest to a number of key publics, O'Brien explains. "Among those scrutinizing your corporate shadow are your civic leaders, customers, regulators, special interest groups, shareholders, employees, not to mention the media, and probably your competition" (O'Brien, 1997, p.8).

Corporate philanthropy was severely limited until as recently as 1954. In that year, a New Jersey Supreme Court allowed that a company could give money to a nonprofit as

long as it would not result in direct monetary returns for the company (Manon & Varadarajan, 1988). Paul Davis Jones (1997) views the rise in strategic philanthropy as a response to the government's reduction in funding for social programs. Companies are carefully selecting causes that are in line with the product or service offered, or that intersect with the company's expertise. Craig Smith calls this link between giving and business objectives "the two-way street" (1994).

In a survey of over 50 Silicon Valley companies, "partnering with non profit organizations" out-ranked volunteer programs as the best means to achieve community involvement goals (Hanson, Davis, Juergens & Wilbur, 1997, p.12). Such a "partnership" would likely entail long term monetary support for the non-profit organization, and could contain a volunteer component. But according to Paul Ostergard, head of the Citicorp Foundation, "By itself, checkbook philanthropy is going to be ineffective in getting disadvantaged kids on a college bound track" (Deutsch, 1997, p.12). A program that engages the community at different levels with any available company resources will be more effective.

Sun's Open Gateways program is such a multi-tiered approach. Sun provides free computer hardware as well as a network, a curriculum, and substantial teacher training. The program also provides actual grant monies to different schools that qualify. Instead of just providing a check, the schools and the equipment are being **supported** by the volunteers, and the schools can continue to contact volunteers throughout the year as issues arise with the new equipment.

Corporate Reputation, Cause Related Marketing & Consumer Loyalty

By establishing a relationship with a non-profit through volunteerism or philanthropy, the company can "carve out a unique niche and develop a clear identity with an issue" (Jones, 1997, p.36).

It is often the role of a company's public relations department to articulate both externally and internally the level of involvement in the local community. To maximize press coverage and customer appreciation for philanthropy and/or volunteerism, the entire workforce should be aware of those efforts. Davis Young explains:

You cannot have a good external reputation unless you have a good internal reputation. There are multiple reputation stakeholders. First among equals are employees... Your own employees will be vocal about their relationships with your organization — good or bad (1996, p.12).

Advertising is another crucial aspect of developing a company's corporate identity. Thomas Garbett uses the umbrella term **corporate advertising**, which focuses on the company's image, rather than a particular product. Corporate advertising can be broken down into subgroups, issue advertising and advocacy advertising (1982). Garbett explains that the RJ Reynolds commercials which defends the rights of smokers are examples of issue advertising. Because this approach can generate controversy, Garbett estimates that only 2-3% of corporate advertising efforts focus on a company's image, and of that small percentage, less than 5% is considered issue advertising.

A similar approach to issue advertising is cause-related marketing. But cause-related marketing (CRM) should not be confused with strategic philanthropy. Paul Davis Jones feels that CRM reflects only a short-term commitment to an issue. Cary Raymond insists, "CRM is not negative, but we have to recognize that it is 'sales'" (C. Raymond, personal communication, 1997) and usually comes out of the advertising/sales budget (Manon & Varadarajan, 1988).

A popular example of CRM is the American Express campaign (Manon & Varadarajan, 1988). American Express donated 1% of each charge transaction during a specified period to the restoration of the Statue of Liberty. To participate, customers had to use the card. They raised \$1.7 million for the restoration project. Raymond clarifies that with CRM, a company needs to understand that a tangible result (e.g. a boost in

sales) may never be attributable solely to its program (C. Raymond, personal communication, 1997). Other factors, including the time of year (peak holiday shopping or tax-time), the economic climate, an increase in television advertising, or changes among the competition may all affect consumers' credit card use.

Authors Robin Simons and Richard Steckel offer a detailed list of ways that companies can align with non-profits and reap benefits:

These companies know that by linking their names, images and products to causes consumers care about, they can encourage sales. In a time of stiff corporate competition and unremitting social problems, ties to non-profit organizations are an effective business building tool (1992, p.1).

To protect their altruistic intentions, companies should avoid confusing CRM efforts with strategic philanthropy. An increasingly cynical Craig Smith explains "Corporate philanthropy has always brushed up against marketing, public relations, government relations and HR management. But now companies are far more explicit about using it as a subtle means of manipulation" (Deutsch, 1997, p.12).

Sun has managed to incorporate a marketing objective into its Open Gateways program. By providing schools and teachers with training and equipment that is manufactured by Sun, those people will be more likely to continue using Sun products in the schools and recommend those products to other people. Sun is building a customer base via public education. Sun is careful to ensure that this marketing objective never overshadows the positive impact the program appears to be having on public schools. And Sun's program is different than cause related marketing because it is not asking customers to donate to the schools — Sun is donating directly, and no purchase needs to be made for Sun to carry out its Open Gateways program. Sun is accomplishing a marketing objective, gaining reputation enhancement, and providing needed technology to local schools.

Maintaining a solid corporate reputation is much more complicated than protecting a brand reputation (Olins, 1989). Consumers are increasingly interested in how multinational corporations handle labor issues. And with regard to environmentalists' interests, Olins (1989) and Garbett (1982) warn that aligning with a particular issue may gain one political group's approval at the expense of another.

In his book, *Managing the Corporate Image*, author J.G. Gray describes ARCO's "Innovative Programs for Protecting the Environment," explaining that "Examples of innovative ARCO programs for *correcting* environmental disturbances are plentiful" (1986, p.43). *Correcting* damage is not the same as *protecting* the environment, and even Gray seems to have difficulty separating the two in his praise of ARCO's efforts. The number of ways a company manipulates its image necessitates a more savvy consumer.

Jones warns that if companies rely too much on their reputation for corporate involvement, journalists, consumers, and competitors may seize upon any slight departure from their do-gooder image. The more a company reinforces that image, the more vulnerable it becomes (1996).

In order for companies to avoid attracting unwanted critics, Juliet Williams suggests companies implement *workplace marketing*. Because employees are often the link between the customer and the company, the more successful internal communications are at reinforcing corporate values and the importance of community involvement, the more likely these messages will reach customers (Williams, 1994). Companies with a management style that fosters employee happiness find it improves customer service.

According to Williams, the four steps needed to establish workplace marketing are:

1. to break down all obstacles to open communication between management and the workforce...
2. to ensure that brand images, perceptions, and values promoted to the consumer are not only understood but owned through the workforce...
3. to provoke volunteerism ...
4. to gain competitive advantage through the ongoing management of the relationships we create (1994, pp. 70-71).

Volunteering is another way employees can take pride in their company's positive impact on the communities it serves, and that pride translates into how those employees perform, and how they represent the company to potential customers.

Specific Tools for Measurement & Evaluation

But how does Sun evaluate the impact of its volunteer programs? Dozier et al emphasize that "The strategic success or failure of communication programs is determined by relationships between organizations and key publics. Are members of a key public knowledgeable or even aware of the organization's position on an issue of mutual concern?" (Dozier et al., 1995, p.32). So if Sun wants to communicate to local stakeholders its achievements as a corporate citizen, it must assess the community's level of awareness. Dozier et al. recommend conducting surveys and focus groups with members of the key publics (1995).

Shortly after his appeal for more quantitative research, Craig Smith had an opportunity to join a diverse research team and a coalition of 16 multinational companies including Ford, Hewlett Packard, DuPont and Levi Strauss in an effort to

- 1) develop tools and techniques for measuring the impact of corporate citizenship programs and 2) to test these new performance measures on participating companies (Council on Foundations, 1996, p.ii).

Instead of standardizing their approach, as Barnes advocates, they came up with a number of different methods of measurement. They suggested that companies select the method(s) that best fit the goals of their corporate citizenship program. For example, they describe a variety of cost-benefit analyses that utilize data gathered through surveys. These surveys help determine the percentage of employees who say their company's corporate citizenship is a reason they stay with the company. The costs of recruiting and training a group of employees also can be calculated, thus measuring the value of volunteer programs in worker retention.

Another method involves determining a program's economic value added (EVA). The program manager adds up the costs of the program and subtracts those numbers from aggregate benefits including tax savings, savings in training, value of media attention, etc. "Measurable Benefits minus Costs of Operation = Citizenship EVA" (Council on Foundations, 1996, p.7).

The Council on Foundations recommends another method based on survey results. Employee survey responses are used to assess the importance of different aspects of a company's societal value. These aspects are listed as: "Business Practices & Ethics; Financial Stability; Good Corporate Citizen; Employee Treatment; and Cares About Environment" (1996, p.14). Researchers then use multiple regression analysis to determine *impact coefficients*. Those aspects with the highest coefficients are judged as having the biggest impact on the company's perceived societal value.

Another method comes from the field of advertising: copy testing. This requires that an audience look at a number of community outreach initiatives on paper and identify which ones would engender their future business (Council on Foundations, 1996). The coalition's last suggestion is the SmithO'Brien Social Audit. This audit tries to link business behavior with financial results. It conducts surveys and interviews employees to estimate the effects of a company's current procedures in areas including "the environment; manufacturing; quality assurance; employee practices; and community relations." The audit seeks to "quantify the financial effects of operating more responsibly" (p.22).

At Tom's of Maine, corporate citizenship is at the core of the company's philosophy. CEO Tom Chappell asserts that the company has certain responsibilities which include being a valuable contributor to the community. The company makes a conscious effort to publicize its community involvement and company values. Tom's of Maine's research showed that the company received almost 5% of total industry- wide media

"impressions," while it captured only 1% of domestic sales in its industry. "Our high share of ink is a direct result of the quality of the story we have to tell. This is, therefore, a direct, measurable business return for our values and mission efforts" (Dylan Rheinhardt, personal communication, 1997).

As these examples illustrate, companies are being forced to think creatively about ways to measure these soft measurables — alternatives to "return on investment" and cents on the dollar (C. Raymond, personal communication, 1997).

Studies in Measurement of Volunteer Programs: The British Invasion

Michael Tuffrey of London's Corporate Citizenship Company Ltd. worked with 18 companies to compile data for his report "Valuing Employee Community Involvement." By focusing on how employees' skills are enhanced through volunteer efforts, Tuffrey's findings demonstrate "how evaluation techniques can be used to assess both the competency development by the individual and the consequential benefit to business" (Tuffrey, 1998, p.1).

Why should companies try to measure the benefits of such programs? According to Tuffrey, "to reassure staff of the benefits to them, to keep employee community involvement effective, and to justify the allocation of scarce company resources to this relatively new area of human resource management" (1998, p.5).

The author makes special note of the newness of this kind of evaluation:

For the first time this assembled the available hard evidence of the benefits companies are gaining in human resource management and devised suitable techniques to assist employers in evaluation (p.1).

The Tuffrey study involved nine companies and 375 employees. The findings were presented in the form of six brief case studies, which utilized similar methods to measure both employee skill enhancement and business benefits. Those employees who completed a "before and after" assessment of competency gain reported a 17% aggregate

improvement, calculated by averaging their percentage competency gain in seven different skill areas. Because of concern over bias in self-assessment, additional evaluations were conducted by the employees' line managers. In all but one of the skill areas, self-reported gains were higher than those assessed by the line managers, supporting the notion that bias exists (Tuffrey, 1998).

The top three skills enhanced during these community involvement programs were communication, followed by team work, and creative thinking. Larger percentage increases in skill development occurred among the less senior staff. Tuffrey attributes this to their age and their lack of opportunity to build those skills needed for senior management. That would suggest that these programs help foster employees better suited for management responsibilities (1998).

To measure the business benefit, Tuffrey recommends that a survey or questionnaire ask participants how these specific skills will be relevant in the workplace, how that will benefit the company, and by how much. He also suggests comparing the cost of recruiting a skilled outsider with the cost of training someone within the company. This last method produces an actual dollar amount (1998).

Other noted benefits included better relationships with the community, an improved company image, increased worker morale and pride, less turnover, and more employee self-confidence. Some of the specific skills measured included "communication, team work, problem solving, decision making, leadership, and planning" (Tuffrey, 1998, p.8). **Business benefits** include earning new business, and public relations benefits such as "increased profile in areas, improved reputation, and community links" (p.8).

It would seem to be another "British Invasion" with reports and benchmark models coming from all over the UK. In addition to Tuffrey, The London Benchmarking Group under David Logan, has prepared a sample template for companies to evaluate

their community involvement (1997). The template is divided into sections including "Activity, Inputs, Outputs, Social Impact, and Business Benefits" (p.7). The categories on the other side of the matrix are "Charity, Social Investment, and Commercial Initiatives" (p.7). With this template, volunteering appears under the group heading "Charity." Each aspect of a corporation's citizenship is examined in detail and can be compared against other aspects. The researchers offer it as an alternative to current methods, hoping that it might become a standard tool used by different companies.

Not to be outdone, British Telecom (BT), one of the largest companies in the UK, offers its Business Excellence Model, which juxtaposes "enablers" like Policy against "results" like Impact on Society (1997). Through self-assessment and "evidence" reflecting the community's perception of BT, the model helps the company evaluate its progress in meeting its numerous communities' needs against its main objective, which is to continually improve BT's Corporate Reputation.

Once again, we have the undeniable link between Public Relations/ Reputation Building and the importance of community involvement. BT tracks what opinion leaders and the media say about the company, but it also conducts a random survey of over 9,000 people every month (to establish the "key corporate attitude score") to assess the general public's perception of the company. As mentioned earlier, gathering this input from key publics is crucial to the most effective PR programs (Dozier et al., 1995). It would seem that BT has developed a two-way symmetrical relationship with its potential customers, providing input for the company's future direction as well.

BT notes that hundreds of other companies have adopted their Business Excellence Model to evaluate their "Impact on Society." They also invite other companies to publish their submission for the European Quality Awards in the Society Impact category so that "a clear benchmark will be created for corporate community involvement" (British Telecom, 1997, p.4).

Focusing on the Business Benefits

Cathleen Wild reported her findings from a 1993 Conference Board study *Corporate Volunteer Programs: Benefits to Business*. In that report, the president of the Conference Board points out that "such programs also benefit business and employees, particularly when corporate volunteering is considered a *strategic* function" (p.5).

Wild gathered the data for her study from 454 returned questionnaires from companies with a median workforce of 5,000. Of that group, she selected a subset to interview by phone, and eventually conducted on-site observation and interviews at several companies. She interviewed directors of public relations and community relations, CEOs and CFOs (1993). Her study provides a helpful overview of the trends in corporate volunteer programs and the associated beliefs that corporate leaders have about their actual benefits in specific areas.

Wild's respondents felt that worker morale, team work, and higher productivity were direct advantages of these programs. But when asked whether there was a direct link between volunteer programs and profitability, just over 50% would "somewhat agree." The fact that managers don't readily acknowledge a direct, bottom-line value makes it all the more important for those in charge of the programs to conduct regular evaluations. Wild (1993) was surprised to get a result so unlike David Lewin's 1991 findings, which showed that financial payoffs including return on assets and investments were clearly connected to volunteer programs.

Further emphasizing that these volunteer programs are an extension of community relations and should be communicated internally and externally, respondents said that 45% of their time involves community relations, while 32% involves Communications/Public Relations (Wild, 1993). How is information about such programs communicated internally? Wild lists "recognition events" that include receptions and articles in company publications, specifically newsletters, and by

employee word-of-mouth. Tenneco suggests in its five-part volunteer program strategy "developing an active communications program for both internal and external audiences" (Wild, 1993, p.23) to recognize volunteer efforts.

Justifying the Program Costs

Respondents feel that community outreach is most effective when linked to the company's mission and its strategic business objectives. And Wild's survey results show a definite perceived benefit for the workforce. Respondents strongly agree that such involvement boosts teamwork and worker morale and more than 50% feel that these actions provide important worker training opportunities. Among those skills listed: "Communications skills; organizational and time management skills; people skills; accountability and assessment reporting; planning skills; budgeting and allocation; stress management and prioritizing" (Wild, 1993, p.20). Other broader benefits include increased creativity, diversity appreciation, a sense of community, pride, and self-esteem. Clearly, volunteer programs can improve employees' abilities, therefore enhancing the company's overall success. But Wild found that 75% also see these opportunities as integral to both employee retention and recruitment of good workers (1993).

Wild notes that even in the face of downsizing, the participation percentage in such activities has gone up. Her findings show that

Most companies that have invested in corporate volunteer programs are so soundly convinced of their return on investment that they say they could not afford to discontinue these programs. Executives interviewed for this study also agree that in uncertain times people have more need for the sense of doing something good and meaningful (Wild, 1993, p.13).

At a 1998 seminar in Santa Clara, California sponsored by the Community Foundation - Silicon Valley, local business people discussed the region's philanthropy/volunteerism efforts. CEOs from three different companies described in

detail who spearheads their corporate philanthropy programs, how they are organized, and how they are financed. From their examples, several common elements emerged which contributed to a program's success: 1) the programs were employee driven; 2) the leaders at the top supported them; and 3) these programs were protected in less profitable periods by reserving money during highly profitable years. This finding echoes Wild's conclusion that some key leaders are so convinced of the benefits that they will maintain volunteer and philanthropic programs even during economic downturns.

Public Relations Approach: Trumpet with Caution

Wild (1993) found overwhelming agreement (86% strongly agree) that volunteer programs enhance the corporation's image. One community relations director claimed that it would not be possible to generate the same results through similar spending on advertising. But there may be some disagreement over how much a company should overtly publicize its own community involvement.

As Stephanie Weiss notes in her business case study (1991) on GE Plastics' one-day employee volunteer projects, early on "GE had made the decision not to publicize the renovations, due to the fear that some, including employees, would cynically conclude the projects were merely grandstanding for the sake of publicity" (p.2). According to Wild, when companies make monetary contributions they are

wary of trumpeting this most obvious benefit because they fear the imputation of self-interest, but without exception they point to their volunteer programs as vehicles for spreading information about the company and reaping a measure of good will (1993, p.22).

The London Benchmarking Group suggests that another reason for not publicizing the business benefits in detail may be to protect an aspect of the company's "competitive advantage." Surely that further supports the idea that community involvement directly correlates to bottom-line profitability.

Assessing Impact on Non-Profits: Outcome-Based Versus Process-Based Evaluation

Volunteer programs have taken to borrowing an evaluation approach from the grantmaking side of community relations. Corporate community relations professionals are increasingly using outcome-based evaluation instead of process-based evaluation (Minnesota Department of Human Services, 1997). This shift has been officially adopted by agencies including the United Way, which now requires Outcome-based evaluations from its grantees.

According to the Minnesota Department of Human Services' handbook, titled *Measuring the Difference Volunteers Make*, a process-based approach details the efforts and plans of the lead volunteer organization rather than the effect those efforts ultimately have on the "client." An Outcome-based approach forces volunteers to look ahead at what they want to see as the product of their efforts, not the amount of energy and number of hours they pledge to put in — an important distinction (1997).

In a seminar titled "Evaluation of Corporate Relations Programs," Professor Martin Roth has adapted the United Way model, creating a four-step flow chart: **"1) INPUTS —> 2) ACTIVITIES —> 3) OUTCOMES —> 4) IMPACTS"** (Center on Corporate Community Relations, 1998, Section 2, p.4). So, for example, an **Input** for the Sun Open Gateways program would be staff time, an **Activity** would be Training Teachers, an **Outcome** would be that 28 teachers were trained for 18 hours each, and the **Impact**, which according to Roth is hardest to measure, would be their increased knowledge. Any company can throw money or volunteer labor into a project but that in itself does not guarantee results. By defining the desired **Impacts** and assessing progress toward achieving them, a company can ensure a more effective program.

Using a slightly different spin, The United Way of Greater Milwaukee developed an evaluation framework that can have either a Client Focus, Volunteer Focus or Program

Focus. First it set an Outcome Objective, for example "youth who remain in a mentoring program for 3 months will have a positive, trusting relationship with an adult" (Minnesota Department of Human Services, 1997, p.24). Next they provide an Outcome Measure, a tool (in this case, a questionnaire) to assess the relationship, and an agreed on Performance Standard. In this case a specific percentage of parents, mentors, and youth must report that the program had positive results in order to be considered successful.

Similarly, Tenneco documented a reduction in dropout rates and an increase in college acceptance since the inception of its program at a local school (Wild, 1993). Intel measured an increase in the number of students reading at grade level since its efforts at a particular school began. But these examples are rare in current literature, causing Wild to emphasize the need for better monitoring of employee involvement and commitment, perhaps using a database.

In her findings on evaluation, Wild notes that most information on these programs exists in the form of narrative anecdotes. The source for this information is primarily those organizations hosting the volunteers, as well as testimonials from employees and their managers. Approximately 1/3 of survey respondents gather some data about their program's impact but less than 5% of the respondents conduct either cost benefit or financial analysis (1993). The numerical data that was most often tracked included hours volunteered and responses to surveys, while a lower percentage calculated the dollar value of donated hours.

British Telecom has developed a fairly comprehensive approach to measuring the success of its educational initiatives. BT annually measures the satisfaction of participants in its intern and teacher programs. The company also sets specific objectives each year for its program. BT surveyed all the parties involved in the

partnership including school students, their parents, teachers, and the BT volunteer mentors before the program began and again at the end (1997).

Sources for Evaluation Data

To conduct successful Outcome-based evaluation, program managers need to have access to existing data or collect their own. In the Center on Corporate Community Relations seminar booklet, Professor Martin Roth provides the following list of sources commonly used for program assessment:

- Depth Interviews
- Participant and non-participant observation
- Surveys by phone, mail and in person
- Internal company accounting, phone and/or mail inquiries
- Community Records
- Volunteerism Reports
- Philanthropy
- Demographic Data (1998, Section 2, p.6).

Long Term Versus Short Term

Gillian Flynn writes about an Atlanta-based company, Equifax, whose unique pilot program stretched employees' volunteer commitments out to a longer-term, matched-interest at a local non-profit. The option was offered as a transition into retirement, during which employees would remain on salary, utilize skills they acquired after a number of years at the company, and make a true impact on their local community. Equifax benefits by helping long-time employees shift gradually to retirement, and gains appreciation from the surrounding community, which may translate into sales (1994).

One of the most respected and long-term programs was started by Xerox in 1976. Timothy Harper researched their program and found that today, employees can apply for volunteer sabbaticals lasting one month to an entire year, retaining their same salary and benefits. Harper notes that Xerox executives talk about the increase in "enthusiasm and creativity" their employees show upon returning to work. Yet those same executives don't appear concerned over the costs of this program and don't try to prove its fiscal

benefits. CEO Paul Allaire insists that these programs are an extension of the company's culture and values (Harper, 1997).

But can one-day programs produce impressive results for employees as well? The Share to Gain program was established in 1988 by Joel Hutt, then manager of marketing communications, and his team at GE Plastics. The concept is to foster teamwork and improve productivity by engaging the entire workforce in an all-day renovation of a non-profit facility. Past projects have included a YMCA, a counseling center, homeless shelter, and Boys & Girls Club (Weiss, 1991).

The primary motivation behind the first Share to Gain program was to foster team building between GE Plastics employees and new workers acquired in a merger with former competitor, Borg-Warner. According to Weiss (1991), the business benefits include increased worker morale, more effective teamwork, and reputation building among key publics. Although specific percentages were not provided, the success was measured by the number of Borg-Warner employees who decided shortly after the program to move their families to Pittsfield and officially join their former competitor's workforce. Interviews conducted by Weiss support the claim that GE Plastics' reputation was enhanced, but no survey was conducted and nothing was quantified. The benefit to the *community*, however, is concrete — a refurbished facility.

Zeroing in on Silicon Valley

In a 1997 study titled *Corporate Community Involvement in Silicon Valley*, 100 Silicon Valley companies were surveyed, the second in a series of studies. Of the 100 surveyed, the findings were drawn from 57 responses. In the earlier study, 54 companies responded, and Sun Microsystems participated in both studies (Hanson et al. 1997; Hanson, Hero, Koch, Klein & Weber, 1994).

The two surveys enabled Kirk Hanson and his research team to do a very focused comparison over a three-year span. The key findings are demonstrated primarily by

tables showing percentage changes in that sample group of companies over that time period. One of the key conclusions is that the number of companies in the survey sample that have volunteer programs has increased, rising from 55% in 1994 to 71% in 1997 (Hanson et al., 1997).

The 1994 study provides interesting qualitative highlights, along the lines of Best Practices, and attributes them to various Silicon Valley companies. For example, "Coopers and Lybrand has included community involvement as one measure of performance for all its professionals" (Hanson et al., 1994, p.21). In the three-year span, Hanson et al. found that Silicon Valley companies give away more product and "in-kind" goods, compared to national giving trends, and a high percentage of that giving is geared toward education in the Bay Area. Researchers also found that "professionalization of community affairs programs has progressed ... when measured by systems and management methods employed, but has not been accompanied by any increase in community affairs staff" (Hanson et al., 1997, p.5).

Current Opinions

Some CEOs anticipated that under the Clinton administration, tabled legislation might be passed rewarding companies that qualify as "corporate citizens" with special tax breaks, etc. Those CEOs are not opposed to voluntary community involvement. Their fear is having it mandated by the government. In addition, some business leaders are concerned that Clinton is allowing government to shirk its social duties and hand the bill and the responsibility to business.

Craig Smith would argue that corporations' prevalent need to cut back has reduced budgets across the board. He feels that strategic philanthropy arose out of the increasing need to justify "giving away money while laying off workers" (1994, p.105). In other cases, a company's value system may dictate that it should give back to the community

with no guarantee that those outreach efforts will bring direct financial benefits. A *Time Magazine* article on Tom's of Maine founder Tom Chappell explains,

He and like-minded leaders view profits as a product of doing the right thing.... In the 1960s they might have been at sit-ins for social justice. Today they have enough success to apply practical ways to achieve their goals (Kadlec, 1997, p.63).

Wild's survey found that employees would be even more motivated if their CEO was an active volunteer (1993). So it would seem that the more ingrained corporate citizenship is in a company's culture, either through company history, or current leadership's example, the more employees will respond and the more genuine the commitment will appear to internal and external publics.

CHAPTER III

Methodology

Research for this thesis was designed around a single case study tracing the history and benefits of Sun's corporate volunteer program. In particular, this study examined whether specific business benefits of the program have been evaluated by Sun, and how those benefits are being communicated to key publics.

Choosing A Qualitative Approach

A qualitative approach was chosen because currently no formal theory exists in the area of corporate community involvement. In lieu of theory, industry-identified best practices have emerged. One of the purposes of this case study was to seek out an existing model for corporate volunteer programs, and to ascertain whether or not Sun's program could be that model if no other model emerged through the literature review. Or if, at the very least, some of Sun's "best practices" might prove to be innovative and adaptable to other companies' programs. Other programs could then be compared to Sun's model for purposes of evaluation. Lindlof discusses how qualitative methods can enable these types of comparisons:

One does generalize in qualitative research, but not in a way that tries to attain the scope of a universal law. Instead, the richness of the particular elements that are documented and the patterns or themes they exhibit allow the researcher to generalize to other cases of the same problem in a larger culture. By expanding the meanings of the case to historical or other frames of reference, one can compare interpretations of meaning and action from one culture to another (Lindlof, 1995, p.57).

With this absence of formal theory in the area of community relations, it is difficult to apply quantitative methods. As Lindlof explains,

In most quantitative work, on the other hand, research designs are used to verify or refute a set of questions about the empirical world. The questions asked are rarely about the ontological status of objects and activities. They are questions that have been defined in advance of data gathering, as they derive straightforwardly from a body of theory and empirical findings (1995, p.63).

The exploratory nature of this study, therefore, is best suited toward a qualitative approach.

Utilizing the Case Study Method

The single case study was the method selected for this inquiry. If a universally accepted model had already been identified, a multiple-case study might have been conducted, comparing a large number of companies' programs to the ideal model. But because Sun's program must be explored in-depth in order to determine whether it can be used as a model, a single case study was selected as the most appropriate method.

Although formal theory does not exist in the field of corporate community relations, guidelines have been developed. These guidelines take the place of theoretical propositions, which have yet to emerge in this area of study. The researcher's aim is to determine whether or not Sun's program fit the ALFSV guidelines, and is therefore a good model. "This type of question is a justifiable rationale for conducting an exploratory study, the goal being to develop pertinent hypotheses and propositions for further inquiry" (Yin, 1984, p.17).

According to Robert Yin, the six sources involved in a case study may include "documentation, archival records, interviews, direct observation, participant observation and physical artifacts" (1984, p.85). Yin reinforces the need to gather different types of evidence to illustrate case study findings. By triangulating (using three different methods to verify information), qualitative research will have more reliability. Yin cites a 1983 study he conducted with Bateman and Moore which showed that cases constructed from several types of evidence received a higher quality rating than those relying on a single kind of evidence (1984).

For this case study, the researcher analyzed **documentation**, conducted **on-site observation**, and performed **in-depth interviews**. Documentation came from a variety of sources including the company's website description of Sun's volunteer

program, electronic mail sent internally to promote the program among its employees, Community Investment Reports, annual reports, foundation grant guidelines, and other relevant materials used by Sun in the promotion of the program.

Strengths and Weaknesses of a Case Study

Perhaps the biggest hurdle in case-study research, particularly at a for-profit company, is gaining access to the information sought. Gerald Salancik summarizes "Our reliance on other people's cooperation selects the knowledge we gather" (1979, p. 196). Arranging for in-depth interviews with key contacts at Sun was crucial to getting the data needed. The researcher conducted interviews with Gary Serda, manager of Worldwide Corporate Affairs department; Jenny Girard, the Volunteer Center of San Mateo employee who helped manage Sun's volunteer program; Elena Ng, a Sun employee who volunteers often through the company's program; Gary Larks, another Sun employee who has volunteered in the Open Gateways program since its inception; Andrea Gooden, the program manager for Education and Community Development; and Phyllis Lindstrom, assistant superintendent - Educational Services of at Evergreen Unified School District in San Jose, California. The information these key contacts have gathered and were willing to provide determined the depth of the case study. And although all of the interviewees were helpful and willing to give the researcher a number of requested materials, there were likely historical memos, electronic mail, as well as proprietary communications that may have more clearly spelled out the importance of bottom-line value in the volunteer program, and they were not offered to the researcher. Because the majority of the interviews were with current Sun employees, they have a certain responsibility as "gatekeepers" to be selective. The fact that some of the desired information may be part of the company's strategic advantage may explain why the researcher was not always given the information she requested.

Another concern that Yin warns of in case study research is researcher bias (1984). The best way to limit the amount of bias may be for the researcher to include a range of viewpoints about the subject and utilize an array of methods to triangulate data and draw conclusions.

One of the benefits of conducting an exploratory case study, according to Lindlof, is that the original question posed at the beginning of the study may shift or change completely by the end of the study (1995). Because a case study is not built on proven theory, the researcher must be prepared for a range of outcomes and needs to be able to adapt and mold the research plan as data is gathered. This flexibility enables the researcher to focus more on finding patterns rather than predicting outcomes (Lindlof, 1995).

Donald Light (1979) recommends direct observation in place of either interviews or surveys when studying organizational behavior. Relying on interviews from within the company could result in a bias favoring the company, especially if interviewees work in the community relations department and have their own messages they want to communicate about the company. The researcher conducted telephone interviews with researchers and executives at the Points of Light Foundation, America's Promise, the Boston College Center on Corporate Community Relations, and the San Mateo and Santa Clara Volunteer Centers to get feedback from people outside Sun Microsystems. The researcher also used the non-participant observation method, attending training for employee volunteers on the Sun campus in Mountain View. The researcher was able to personally verify the seriousness of Sun's volunteer program and the level of planning and evaluation being conducted so that she was not wholly reliant on secondary source information provided by Sun employees.

Matthew Miles (1979) discusses how qualitative research can be combined with quantitative information from the same organization "to produce more powerful analyses

than either could have produced alone" (p.127). He offers a list of rules that a qualitative researcher should adhere to for an effective study: "Consider the validity of any particular generalization. Is there supporting evidence from elsewhere in the data? Does it hold true for several different people, roles, groups or occasions? Is there any negative evidence?" (Miles, 1979, p. 127).

Statement of Hypotheses:

Because Sun sees its volunteer program as a model for other companies, it has likely devoted significant time and resources to setting specific objectives for different aspects of the program, and has likely developed methods for evaluating them in terms that make business sense. Sun's program will likely fit the ALFSV model of a successful, long-term volunteer initiative, proving to be employee driven, integral to the company's culture, and with a history of support from upper management. And if Sun emerges as a leader in community involvement, it is expected that the company also has highly evolved qualitative *and* quantitative methods for assessing its volunteer program's success.

Pattern Matching

There are several modes of analysis that can be used in a case study. The one selected for this particular study is Pattern Matching. Because there are some agreed-upon qualities common to successful volunteer programs, they form a kind of pattern that can be used as a model for comparison. Since this model or "pattern" was developed by the American Leadership Forum of Silicon Valley and was selected for use in this study "prior to data collection" (Yin, 1984, p.109), it fits Yin's requirements for Pattern-Matching. For Sun's program to emerge as a true industry role model, the researcher anticipates that it will share characteristics present in the ALFSV model.

However, if the results fail to show the entire pattern as predicted – that is even if one variable does not behave as predicted – your initial proposition would have to be questioned (Yin, 1984, p.110).

If after analyzing the data, Sun's program fails to correspond with any of the guidelines in the model, the researcher will have to re-examine whether Sun's program can truly qualify as a role model for other companies or whether the ALFSV guidelines need to be altered to enable a better baseline comparison.

Evaluation of Sun's Program as an Effective Model

With all of the emerging methods for program evaluation, the researcher wanted to determine whether Sun successfully quantifies the business benefits of its volunteer program, and which benefits it chooses to focus on. To effectively measure the benefits, the literature review suggests that their evaluation should correlate with the initial objectives of each program, and that they should attempt to conduct benchmark studies whenever possible. Their results should be reported in both language and formats that upper management can easily interpret (Dr. Martin Roth, personal communication, 1998). If Sun has conducted legitimate quantitative analysis and makes that information available to the researcher, that information may be more compelling than the qualitative responses derived from interviews and survey responses.

CHAPTER IV

Findings

The Findings chapter is divided into two sections. The first section is an overview of Sun's program, some detailed information about program design and range of projects, a description of how it is managed, and a discussion of its strategic significance. The second section follows the framework for analysis set out in the Methods chapter. The model for a successful community involvement program, developed by the American Leadership Forum of Silicon Valley, will be used as a way of evaluating Sun's current volunteer program to see whether Sun has implemented and maintained the seven key steps that ALFSV recommends.

Overview of Sun's Corporate Volunteer Program

To effectively understand the level of Sun's commitment to volunteerism and community involvement, the history of the program must be understood. Sun instituted its corporate volunteer program in 1989. According to Gary Serda, Worldwide Corporate Affairs manager, the program was launched in response to 1) political controversy surrounding the East Palo City Council's pending decision on whether to allow Sun Microsystems to build a major campus on the East Palo Alto bayfront ; and 2) Sun employees expressing an interest in doing volunteer work in the surrounding community. "The company gets some visibility, either positive or negative, and questions begin to arise. What have you done to be a good corporate citizen in our community?" (Serda, 1999).

Program Design and Range of Projects

As the company has grown, Sun's corporate volunteer program has evolved to incorporate three major aspects. The umbrella program is called Community Action Volunteers (CAV) and includes all volunteer activities conducted by Sun employees. The two major pieces of the CAV program are Worldwide Volunteer Week and Open

Gateways. For the purpose of this study, Worldwide Volunteer Week and Open Gateways are seen as separate initiatives. All remaining volunteer activities fall under the CAV category. In 1997, an estimated 23,000 hours of volunteer time were donated altogether (Sun Microsystems, 1997).

Sun offers opportunities in these three program areas which include a mix of short-term, one-day, long-term and partnership-oriented opportunities to get involved. Sun demonstrates a breadth and flexibility in volunteer activities that stretches beyond what a number of companies offer, especially given that a number of companies do not offer any volunteer programs at all.

Community Action Volunteers

Community Action Volunteers (CAV) involves recruitment and referral of Sun employees for a range of volunteer projects in the surrounding area. The program managers, two contractors from the San Mateo Volunteer Center and the Santa Clara Volunteer Center, track local opportunities and make them available to Sun employees via electronic mail. Those same contractors manage the logistics of the projects and ensure that each project is sufficiently staffed. It is also their responsibility to solicit feedback from employees on a particular project, as well as from the non-profit organization that may have hosted the project. Community Action Volunteer program enables Sun employees to take some initiative and seek out a non-profit in their area of interest, perhaps one that Sun employees have not previously worked with. It also enables teams from within Sun to build leadership and trust by taking on group projects. The CAV program offers employees the flexibility to give however much of their time they desire because it has opportunities designed to fit different schedules and levels of involvement.

Some examples of recent volunteer activities listed in the Community Investment Report (Sun Microsystems, 1998) include Sun's employees visiting a home for

physically and mentally disabled. Sun employees in Lawrence, Massachusetts organized Career Day to assist youth with resume writing, accessing job opportunities on the internet, and offered longer-term mentoring possibilities. CAV also includes a focused two-week holiday drive that encompasses a number of related projects. In 1997, for example, 60 different buildings on Sun's campuses in Northern California held food and gift donation drives that were managed by selected Sun employees (Sun Microsystems, 1997). Through their leadership roles, Sun employees are expected to gain professional project management experience which should make them even more valuable employees.

Worldwide Volunteer Week

Technically, Worldwide Volunteer Week is a part of CAV, but since it is a very focused effort, this study is approaching it as a separate program. Worldwide Volunteer Week happens once a year when the company organizes close to 1,800 employee volunteers who contribute roughly 7,300 hours of community service in seven days. In 1998, there were over 25 projects happening simultaneously in Northern California alone. An estimated 73 different projects were happening in 41 communities surrounding Sun's different campuses in 15 countries worldwide (Sun Microsystems, 1998). For example, a Sun employee at the Menlo Park campus, Elena Ng, managed and organized a beach clean up of the bayfront along Coyote Point in San Mateo. She worked directly with a volunteer coordinator from the City of San Mateo who handles any volunteer projects involving the city (Ng, 1999). Other projects in 1998 included making improvements in heating systems at homes of seniors and the disabled in Portland, Oregon; homeless youth were given an improved chicken coop to farm their own eggs; German employees helped spruce up part of a surrounding forest, and some British employees organized a bike ride raising money for in-home hospice care (Sun Microsystems, 1998). By allowing each campus to select its own project priority rather

than dictating a similar project at every site, Sun claims that its volunteer projects have a more focused impact and address specific needs in the particular community.

Open Gateways Program

The Open Gateways program also falls under the Community Action Volunteers umbrella. It evolved out of what began as Net Day, a particular date when volunteers from different computer companies including Sun, Cisco, Amdahl, and others worked with other volunteers from school communities around the San Francisco Bay area and across the country to wire public school classrooms and provide internet access. Sun was a founding participant in Net Day and has continued its involvement with a number of the schools by offering additional equipment, software, and teacher training at no cost. According to Andrea Gooden, Sun's program manager for education and community development, approximately 1,000 Sun employees are involved during Net Day. Three-hundred employees continue the commitment year-round, providing training and installing additional equipment. The total number of schools nationwide that have been wired since this initiative began is approximately 500. Again, this work has often been done in conjunction with other companies, and always with the aid of volunteers from the schools and surrounding communities (Gooden, 1999). Open Gateways has pledged to devote over 20,000 hours between 1997 and 2000 to "help schools develop infrastructure to support high-speed networking to training teachers on effective use of network software for classroom integration" (A. Gooden, personal communication, October 1999).

Managing Sun's Volunteer Program

There are four salaried employees in the Worldwide Corporate Affairs department at Sun Microsystems. Two additional contractors from local Volunteer Centers run the day-to-day operations of the Community Action Volunteer program and the Worldwide Volunteer Week. These two contractors, one full-time and one part-time, are also

responsible for communicating directly with Sun employees and tracking most of the data associated with the CAV and Worldwide Volunteer Programs.

Both the manager of Worldwide Corporate Affairs, Gary Serda, and the program manager for education and community development, Andrea Gooden, also have direct roles in managing aspects of the employee volunteer program. Serda also serves as the executive director of the Sun Microsystems Foundation, while Gooden is involved with the Foundation through its educational grantmaking, whether it be cash, equipment or training. The Worldwide Corporate Affairs department has one full-time administrative support person, Jacque Greer. A fourth full-time member of the department, Deborah Giles, is responsible for managing the matching gifts program and any other special projects.

Gary Serda (1998) claims that Sun's model is unique because it was one of the first programs in the country to contract the expertise of the Volunteer Centers. These contractors select and run projects for Sun employees in Santa Clara and San Mateo counties. Sun's first contract with a volunteer center was part-time. In 1999, San Mateo County Volunteer Center employee, Jenny Girard, dedicated a full 40 hours per week to Sun activities. Her colleague in Santa Clara county devoted 25 hours each week to Sun activities. In addition, Sun has hired people in Massachusetts, Colorado, England, and Scotland to run the logistics of the program and interface with non-profit organizations and their involvement ranges from 10 to 30 hours per week (Girard, 1999). Ms. Girard explains that since Northern California is the pilot region for Open Gateways activities, more of her time is required than the manager in Massachusetts who is focused on CAV and Worldwide Volunteer Week only, although Open Gateways is being replicated on a more limited scale at other Sun sites around the world. Another of Ms. Girard and Ms. Whelan's responsibilities is to track the number of volunteers involved in CAV programs, the number of employees that respond to their electronic

mail listings of volunteer opportunities, and the number of hours donated to projects that can easily be tracked, including Holiday Drives and Worldwide Volunteer Week.

Alex Billeb from the Corporate Affairs department at the Points of Light Foundation, is familiar with Sun's program and was able to give some feedback about their use of an outside contractor. "While it is not typically the method we advocate, we see that many companies really don't have the expertise internally... There is no cookie cutter approach. You have to look at the internal culture" (A. Billeb, personal communication, October 19, 1999). The San Mateo and Santa Clara Volunteer Centers' expertise stems from 40 years of experience working with non-profit agencies in their respective counties. They have established relationships with a number of the agencies and know which ones can benefit the most from Sun's volunteer efforts, as well as which ones suit Sun's strategic needs for community involvement (Girard, 1999). The services the San Mateo County Volunteer Center provides, according to Fran Guevarra, the director of agency and community relations, include promoting and advocating volunteerism; maintaining a clearinghouse of volunteer opportunities; recruiting volunteers to assist non-profit agencies; running training for improving non-profit boards, and a youth-focused program to involve young people in civic life through service learning. The San Mateo center only has two full-time contracts with local companies, Oracle and Sun Microsystems. The Volunteer Center offers part-time services to 150 other companies, acting as a recruitment and referral agent and providing resources to staff at those companies who manage the corporate volunteer program directly (F. Guevarra, personal communication, October 1999).

According to Mary Lou Bales, chief operations officer at the Santa Clara County Volunteer Center, her center has part-time contracts with six other companies including Sun; Apple Computers; National Semiconductor; San Jose Mercury News; Compaq; Siemens; and Quantum. They have full-time contracts with Applied Materials and Cisco

(M. L. Bales, personal communication, October 1999). As was previously mentioned, their contract with Sun's campuses in Santa Clara county is for 25 hours per week.

So although Points of Light may not encourage hiring outside contractors, it does not criticize it either. Billeb did point out that in Sun's case, the Volunteer Center contractor does not have an office on-site while in other cases, (at Oracle in Redwood City, for example), the contractor is on-site at the company. Although she did not make an explicit judgment about that aspect, Billeb intimated that an on-site role might demonstrate a higher level of company commitment to the program (A. Billeb, personal communication, October 19, 1999).

Comparing Sun's Program Against the ALFSV Model

Sun Microsystems is a powerful competitor in the computer industry. In fact, CEO Scott McNealy has stated that his main motivation is to beat Microsoft. "Windows is obsolete. We have a chance to show the world that it is" (Hewitt, 1999). Sun is one of the only computer companies that stood up and spoke out against Microsoft, helping to build the anti-trust case against it in Washington D.C. Having the confidence to stand alone is part of the company culture and this same confidence spills over into the company's community relations programs.

Worldwide Corporate Affairs manager, Gary Serda, boasts that Sun's volunteer program is so strong, other companies have used it as a model. With that level of confidence and ambition, the researcher wanted to determine how Sun's volunteer program would fare under close scrutiny, and whether it would prove to be a good model when compared against a set of guidelines developed by the American Leadership Forum of Silicon Valley. By using the ALFSV model, it will also become clear whether those guidelines provide a useful template for comparing different companies' programs against each other.

Soon after Sun was founded, management was getting opinions and input from several of its key publics including the media, local politicians, and its employees, whether solicited or not. So the scenario surrounding the start of Sun's community involvement program fits nicely with Step 1 of the American Leadership Silicon Valley guidelines: **"Gather information: get input from various stakeholders"** (ALFSV, 1997). The ALFSV created these guidelines to prepare companies for launching Community Involvement programs. The researcher has chosen to use them to assess *existing volunteer programs*.

In 1989, Sun employees were asking for a volunteer program (Girard, 1999; Serda, 1998). They wanted opportunities to volunteer in the community and they saw it as a workplace benefit. Because the United States does not have enough workers trained to fill the available openings in computer science and engineering, technology companies are in fierce competition to attract and retain the most qualified people. If Sun did not offer volunteer opportunities, potential employees would likely choose to work at companies that *do* offer such programs. Therefore, to enhance its image as a caring employer, Sun developed its corporate volunteer program. In this way, Sun's volunteer program could be viewed as a strategic advantage.

Meanwhile in 1989, Sun found itself square in the middle of a major city-wide political issue. East Palo Alto was debating whether it should approve development of an expansive Sun campus within its borders. Local property owners were opposed to having Sun locate there and made their feelings publicly known. The surrounding publicity for Sun was not particularly positive, and helped further justify Sun's need for more community involvement. Sun was getting feedback from another key public – the community. In response, Sun launched a public relations campaign detailing the benefits this new facility would have to the city of East Palo Alto.

Sun ensures input today from another stakeholder, its employees, by communicating about volunteer opportunities through electronic mail. Each new Sun employee is contacted after a month on the job by the Worldwide Corporate Affairs department. The electronic mail welcomes them and offers them information about Sun's community involvement in general, as well as the 11 or 12 projects selected by the Volunteer Center for that particular month. If they want more information, they are instructed to contact the Volunteer Center contractors to get involved. Logistics for each project arrive via electronic mail and, regardless of which Sun employee becomes the point person for a project, they communicate with their team of volunteers via electronic mail. Any questions or feedback can be sent to the team leader or to the contractors, Girard and Whelan. Employees can also ask to volunteer for an organization of their choice. By selecting their own volunteer opportunities, employees can take a pro-active approach to providing program input by deciding which local organization to support.

Although Sun has selected K-12 education as the focus of its community involvement, no evidence was found showing Sun's involvement in a community needs assessment, or developing a structured plan for obtaining input from schools regarding their needs. Points of Light suggests that Sun might improve the program by increasing that type of community input:

Currently Sun relies on its Volunteer Centers to survey community needs. Sun may want to also solicit employee input to determine their volunteer needs or what they view as their community's most pressing issues (Points of Light Foundation, 1999).

There was no evidence either in the interviews conducted or from the company's annual report that stockholders, another key public, have any input regarding Sun's Community Involvement. There is no mention of Sun's volunteer program or community work in the Annual Report. It is purely a financial report, specifying earnings, key business partnerships, details on future products, etc. CEO Scott

McNealy's *Letter from the Chairman* discusses future trends in the industry and quantifies percentage increases in different business segments of the company. For example, he describes how "the Solaris Operating Environment showed a remarkable 49% increase in growth rate" (Sun Microsystems, 1998) and lists numbers of Java Downloads annually, as well as the percentage market share increase in Unix workstations sold. There is no shortage of quantitative measurements in this report, but there are no numbers reflecting the impact of the volunteer efforts on company profit. McNealy mentions the importance of attracting excellent employees, and offering unique benefits to recruit and retain the best employees, but he does not describe any in detail. **"Step 2. Get Company Wide Commitment"** (ALFSV, 1997).

This second ALFSV guideline is intended for consideration *before* a company begins a community involvement program. It seems crucial, however, to continue to evaluate participation companywide in Sun's volunteer program, especially the level and type of support provided from people at the upper echelons. Sun's volunteer program is open to anyone from any department. And as previously stated, every new employee, regardless of his/her job title, receives a "Welcome" electronic mail message from the Worldwide Corporate Affairs department that orients them to Sun's community involvement programs and lists current volunteer opportunities. At any time, an employee can select an organization, take some initiative, and arrange to volunteer there.

Opportunities for *managing* volunteer projects are open to people from every level in the company and, according to Gary Serda (1998), it is not uncommon to have someone lower on the totem pole manage someone higher up on a volunteer project.

When they volunteer, we have no idea who they are. Obviously we recognize names. But sometimes there will be someone out there digging a ditch, and that person can be a director, which is a real senior person here. On the other hand, we might have a building ambassador who is running a whole volunteer team, and that person might be an administrator. So this is a very egalitarian, democratic culture around volunteerism here...(Serda, 1998).

Recognition or Lip Service?

CEO McNealy currently acts as the "voice" of the company when it comes to publicly encouraging community activism, but his efforts are often prompted by the Worldwide Corporate Affairs department. According to Serda, Scott McNealy spoke to employees about the importance of community involvement when he opened new campuses in Massachusetts and Colorado, though his comments were scripted by Serda's Worldwide Corporate Affairs Department (1998). McNealy also signs letters thanking and acknowledging employees for their volunteer efforts. But neither Serda nor Gooden offered stories of McNealy participating in a company-sponsored volunteer event, even though such participation could send a strong message to Sun employees. When asked why McNealy had no direct involvement in volunteer projects, Serda justified

You know, he's out selling and we're a ten billion dollar company, and we've got 25,000 employees ... so we write the letter... Is it really senior support? Sure, he supports it... But that was supported by having a department that established volunteer recognition as a best practice (1999).

Andrea Gooden was also unable to point to specific evidence of Scott McNealy participating in Net Day or Open Gateways. She referred the researcher to McNealy's letters in the Community Investment Reports and in general to Sun's website, but there was no clear evidence of his hands-on involvement.

McNealy and Gage Show Long-Term Commitment

If upper management hasn't been lauding Sun's community involvement in the public spotlight, CEO Scott McNealy and chief technology officer John Gage's actions demonstrate a long-term commitment to the community, at least through the Open Gateways program. The concept for Net Day, which evolved into Open Gateways, was co-founded by John Gage, chief technology officer at Sun Microsystems. The goal behind Net Day was to link all 130,000 public and private schools in the United States to

the internet. Gage saw this link as a launching pad for major improvements in the way teachers and students access information and educational curricula:

It takes time for teachers to explore but suddenly it's free. It enables access to information to a whole set of schools that can't afford to replace outdated textbooks.... The wiring of schools is an absolutely critical component for creating a base from which all these other activities and applications can take place (Internet Week, 1997, p.22).

As Phyllis Lindstrom, assistant superintendent of Evergreen School District explains, when Net Day began, there were a number of Silicon Valley companies involved as well as other corporations nationwide. It wasn't unusual for Sun employees to help install wiring and equipment made by their competitors into Bay Area schools (1999). So initially, Net Day was *not* positioned as a way to bring Sun equipment into the classroom. The vision was to improve the ability of schools to work with current technology and ultimately do a better job of preparing tomorrow's workforce. Succeeding in such an endeavor would benefit all companies and communities in the long run (Lindstrom, 1999). Sun has shown its commitment to Net Day by expanding it to Open Gateways, and providing free software, hardware, and teacher training to many of the schools wired through Net Day. Open Gateways also offers grants for hardware and software so that schools that were not involved initially with Net Day can still benefit.

Gary Larks, a Sun employee for ten years and a veteran of Sun's five Net Days, is convinced that Scott McNealy's personal commitment to Open Gateways is genuine because of the way he responded to a request from Gary to help complete server access to all the schools in the Evergreen School District in San Jose. Larks initially got involved with Net Day because he wanted to improve computer technology in the district where his two children attended school. With Larks' leadership, the Evergreen District successfully applied to Net Day and all 15 schools were eventually wired with internet access. In addition, the Scott and Susan McNealy Foundation had donated two servers

to each participating school district every year on Net Day. When Sun announced that the fifth Net Day would be the last, Gary Larks realized that ten schools in his district would have a Sun server, but five would not. Larks had established a rapport with Susan McNealy when she worked briefly at the company and was involved in Net Day decisions. She had taken maternity leave and was no longer reachable by electronic mail. Larks decided to send an electronic mail message directly to Scott McNealy, asking him to pass along a request to Susan for help with his school district. Larks explained that since this was the last Net Day, he was hoping to get all of the Evergreen District schools outfitted with Sun servers, and even with the two donated at the last Net Day, he would still be five short. Susan McNealy responded via electronic mail.

I came in on a Monday morning and there was an e-mail from Susan McNealy and she says "Would \$50,000 be enough?" And I said "Oh yeah, thank you!" So the Scott and Susan McNealy foundation donated \$50,000. I was impressed. It made me feel super (Larks, 1999).

With the McNealy's donation, Evergreen School District was able to purchase the remaining servers and wiring to fully outfit the entire district.

No Paid Time Off

Throughout his involvement with Open Gateways, Gary Larks has had to miss some time at work and occasionally he has not been able to make that time up. This has never caused concern among his managers.

I've had three different bosses during the Net Days and every time I've done this, I've gone in and said "Look, I'm doing this." And they know what it's about because they have seen all the e-mails going around about the volunteerism... But I go in and say... "There are going to be times when I'm not going to be able to be in the office because I need to be in this meeting." And my bosses have supported me 100% (1999).

There may be some flexibility and some hours may not be made up, but Sun definitely does not provide "comp time" or paid time off in exchange for employees' volunteer hours. Dana Lookadoo-Ilari, a trainer contracted to work with Sun's Open Gateways

volunteers, suggested that one of the most helpful things Sun could do for these employees is to give them some Comp Time for their volunteer efforts (D. Ilari, personal communication, November 1999). Both Gooden (1999) and Serda agree that the commitment required from Open Gateways to run this level of training at local schools is substantial.

They have to go through a full day [eight hours total] of training. Then they have to spend a fair amount of time planning their workshops, coordinating them with their schools and then actually delivering them at their schools. And when we did that, we thought "Do people really have that much time to give? Will we really find enough volunteers out there to run this program?" And at the end of the day, we took a flying leap of faith because we believed that our employees would respond and they have (Serda, 1999).

Other than a suggestion that each employee volunteer should work out his/her own arrangement with his/her manager, each employee is primarily expected, as is clear in the Educational Grant guidelines, to volunteer *after work* whenever possible. It should be noted that Sun's policy of *not* offering paid time off is in keeping with current Silicon Valley trends (Hanson et al., 1997).

"3. Identify your goals" (ALFSV, 1997).

As Kyle Zitek explained earlier, the only way to evaluate the effectiveness of volunteer efforts is by clearly defining the volunteer program's objectives. From the interviews conducted with Sun employees, the clearest objectives that emerged are employee recruitment and retention, public relations/community relations, customer base expansion, and employee skill building.

So how does Sun's program address these four objectives: **employee recruitment and retention, employee skill building, customer base expansion, and public relations**? The fact that Sun offers the program because it wants to attract and retain good employees might suggest that there is no need to measure success for any other objectives. Sun is going to offer the program anyway, in order to be a competitive employer. But good management and evaluation are critical if Sun is going to have a

successful program that meets specific objectives, and if their claim to having concern for their surrounding community is going to hold merit.

Recruitment and Retention

Elena Ng, a Sun employee and frequent volunteer, feels that the program is another way to provide job satisfaction. If employees bond with each other through volunteer work, they will be more likely to stay at Sun. Gary Larks supports her idea:

Sun is fostering a belief of volunteerism, of giving back to the community, which is one of the reasons I like working for Sun. They want our people out there helping and if we can... let people know that "Hey, I work for Sun Microsystems and I'm here to help in the community," – it's a goodwill kind of feeling (1999).

Sun makes it easy for employees to volunteer because the program can be tailored to fit their schedule (Ng, 1999). Opportunities range from individual one-time events, to long-term relationships with nonprofit organizations, to team-building projects. By hiring expert contractors from the Volunteer Centers, a Sun employee can easily contact them and say "I really want to volunteer, here are my interests, find a place for me" (Girard, 1999).

Gary Larks sees the volunteer program as a benefit. When asked why he would not rather just volunteer in his own name rather than as a Sun representative, he said: "In my case, I wouldn't know about all the different opportunities out there for volunteering. So by doing it through Sun, there is one main focal point that gives you a bunch of information about different programs (1999)." The contractors at the Volunteer Center are providing Sun employees with a service, the same way employees might utilize on-site drycleaning or free gym access.

While employees like Larks and Ng may feel the program improves recruitment and retention, there is no existing research or survey data substantiating their impressions. A survey could be conducted, asking employees if Sun's community involvement was a

factor in their decision to work there, or if they were even aware of the volunteer program before they began working at the company.

Andrea Gooden sees volunteer programs as a way to boost employee morale (1999). But Gooden has not generated empirical evidence to back her belief. She and the rest of the staff involved with the program seem to accept at face value that morale is being improved and the staff has woven an aspect of employee volunteer involvement into every program it runs. Through grantmaking, for example, employee volunteers review and make recommendations on prospective grantees. Open Gateways involves employee volunteers in both wiring and training at local schools. Through CAV, employees can choose a new project, can manage that project, and then can provide the labor to complete the project.

Employee Skill Building

CEO McNealy addresses skill building directly in the Community Investment Report:

Through our unique "team leader" model, we empower employees to take management responsibility for volunteer projects and programs, and put leadership principles to work in the community (Sun Microsystems, 1998, p.1).

By leading their co-workers in a successful volunteer project, employees gain self-confidence and build concrete experience in project management. According to Gary Serda (1998), the number of department staffed volunteer projects is on the rise, but the actual number of team projects completed so far this year was not given by any staff members who were interviewed.

Because employees from anywhere in the company can take leadership on a particular project or partnership with a non-profit, they may have the opportunity to interact with or even manage their higher-ups, during a volunteer project. This can result in new bonds of trust and respect between workers at different levels in the company.

Andrea Gooden believes that Open Gateways volunteers learn **facilitation** because they train groups of teachers at a time, and **collaboration** because they have to work in

teams of volunteers, often in pairs, to teach different aspects of the curriculum. An added advantage is that those employees will become more knowledgeable about how to use the Star Office software, and she believes that can result in **increased worker productivity** when they are back at their own jobs using that same software (1999). Gooden did not provide, however, any empirical evidence to support her view that these programs enhance professional skills.

Customer Base Expansion

According to Jenny Girard, the Open Gateways program "does have a piece of cause-related marketing" (1999). By wiring school districts to the internet and installing an internal network, Sun is exposing a whole new generation to its products and to Sun's business philosophy: that **networking is the future of computing** and certainly is a more cost-effective way for schools to use computers. Instead of upgrading machines over and over, the idea is to upgrade a single server that is networked to multiple machines. Management of a school's resources becomes easier and more cost-effective. Scott McNealy says, "In keeping with our focused business strategy, Sun's corporate community investment programs target areas where we can have the greatest influence" (Sun Microsystems, 1997, p.1). The influence, according to Gary Larks, is on education. Teachers, students and staff are learning Sun software on Sun machines.

When they get into college or the working world, they can say "I've got familiarity with Star Office" [a Sun product] and I think that other people might say "Gee, we've got all these kids coming out of the school districts and they know this product. Maybe we should start using this product in our companies" (Gary Larks, 1999).

Sun's main focus for Community Involvement is K-12 education. But Gooden insists that group represents only 5% of Sun's 1999 market share. She concedes, however, that it is becoming a bigger market. It is difficult to imagine why a company would devote so much energy to the K-12 schools unless a bottom-line benefit is anticipated, even if it is a long-term benefit. Gooden says that she and Gary Serda are

"selling a philosophy." Sun believes that networking computers will be embraced by both the business sector and the public sector. Sun is selling a new paradigm of network driven systems as the future in computer technology, and Sun sees its role as providing schools with the chance to participate in that trend, keeping pace with the business community (Gooden, 1999).

Public Relations/Community Relations

Gary Serda acknowledges that another objective of the volunteer program is enhancing relationships with key publics, including local government and industry groups.

We think that it [the community involvement program] also helps us with regard to our relations with local business leaders, industry associations, and elected officials. They may not understand the intricacies of Java, but they certainly understand that Sun is a good corporate citizen and one that they want to welcome and support in their communities (1999).

An important facet of Sun's corporate reputation is formed through the actions of various employees who volunteer at different organizations in the community. Employees wear Sun t-shirts when they volunteer, even though they are not compensated by Sun for those hours, but there appears to be little emphasis on promoting Sun's role in the community through the media. Instead, the majority of the company's public relations efforts focus on product roll-out, financial performance, and available upgrades.

Ginger Whelan and Jenny Girard, the Volunteer Center contractors who manage Sun's program, do focus on providing information to their *local* media about volunteer programs. This usually happens during Worldwide Volunteer Week when employees concentrate their efforts, logging 7,000 hours of community service in seven days. To many journalists, working such a large number of volunteer hours in such a short time frame might be a story worth covering, and that PR appeal may be part of why Sun chooses to focus its efforts in a single week.

Girard focuses her efforts on seeking publicity in San Mateo and Santa Clara counties where the Volunteer Center contractors are based, and where she has established media contacts (1999). Since Northern California is the home of Sun's headquarters, the media relationships established by the corporate PR department are already being utilized to promote Sun's advances in technology and product roll-outs. Girard points out that other smaller Sun campuses in Colorado and Scotland may attract more media interest in the volunteer efforts because there is less competition for stories in smaller markets, and Sun would not be competing against its own product publicity for column inches (Girard, 1999).

Another way Sun shows its commitment, according to Kirk Hanson et al., is by publishing a Community Investment Report separate from the annual report, which describes the company's volunteer efforts in detail, including amounts and recipients of in-kind donations and cash grantmaking (1994). Sun's Community Investment Report can be distributed to partners, government agencies, employees, customers, potential customers, board members, stockholders, journalists, etc. These kinds of reports are becoming more prevalent. For instance, Nike publishes a *Global Giving Report* with "Community" in bold letters across the cover; British Telecom prints a *Community Partnership Programme Report*; and Dayton-Hudson publishes a *Community Involvement Report*.

In 1997 and 1998, Sun's Community Investment Reports were four-color, glossy booklets, each leading off with a one-page letter signed by CEO McNealy. The title for both publications was "Connecting People and Possibilities." Both reports devote a page to describing Sun's volunteer programs, another page to Open Gateways, a page on Sun Foundation's Community Grants, and a page on other programs including the company's recycling program, and developments in making technology more user-friendly for people with different disabilities. Both provide a list of the schools and

organizations that receive funds, as well as the dollar amounts given through Sun's community development grants, and both list the staff of the Sun Foundation and the Worldwide Corporate Affairs department (Sun Microsystems, 1997; Sun Microsystems, 1998). Much of this same information is available on the Sun website, with several pages devoted to the volunteer program, including descriptions of previous Worldwide Volunteer Week Activities.

"4. Develop Criteria for Saying Yes and No in response to requests from non-profits); Develop Policies and Procedures" (ALFSV, 1997).

Since every non-profit would welcome volunteer help, Sun could get overwhelmed with requests. By contracting with local Volunteer Centers to run the logistics of the volunteer program, Sun enables these "experts" to be the "gatekeepers." They sift through the number of opportunities and find the ones that best fit the needs of Sun employees and Sun's business strategy. By centralizing the function, the requests are streamlined and forwarded to someone who is directly responsible for assessing and maintaining those partnerships. Again, volunteer opportunities can range from short-term, to one-day, to year-long kinds of involvement. The Volunteer Center contractors know which agencies are organized enough to use Sun volunteers efficiently. And if employees have a particular non-profit they want to work with, that can also be arranged.

This fourth ALFSV guideline is likely referring to policies on grantmaking, suggesting that clear guidelines must be set up before awarding money to non-profit organizations. In the case of the Open Gateways program, the focus has been on donating labor, hardware, and software to schools, and providing a curriculum and teacher training so that a school can be networked. Schools located in the vicinity of Sun campuses are usually the ones selected out of a pool of applicants. Jenny Girard explained that there are three phases of Open Gateways. Phase one is installing network

capability and linking schools to the internet. The second phase is actual grant-making, whether in-kind equipment or cash. The third phase is training teachers to use Sun software and equipment. Because several staff members from the Worldwide Corporate Affairs department also have a formal role in the Sun Microsystems Foundation, they have already developed guidelines for determining grant recipients, and these guidelines are available on the company's website.

It might be expected that Sun's grantmaking would be entirely separate from the company's employee volunteer programs. But at Sun, not only do employees volunteer to review applications from grantees and make recommendations for those they believe fit the criteria, Andrea Gooden has also highlighted her requirement that opportunities for Sun volunteers be incorporated into the grantee's application:

Sun strongly encourages employee volunteerism, on a one-time or ongoing basis through its Community Action Volunteer (CAV) Program. Sun volunteers typically seek opportunities that encourage creativity as well as address a specific agency/school need... Applicants should identify ways that Sun employees can support the project and should describe any past or current volunteer efforts underway. When a grant is awarded, we will be able to determine the scope and nature of volunteer support (Sun Microsystems Foundation, 1998, p.3).

An entire section of the application, Sun Volunteers and Community Outreach, asks a series of questions about the school's work with volunteers including:

1. What specific roles do you envision for Sun volunteers? How might this effort contribute toward helping you achieve specific goals?
2. Describe how you have involved industry volunteers in the past. Please name the companies and any successes or challenges you have had (Sun Microsystems Foundation, 1998, p.8).

"5. Develop a Decision Making Structure (get employees from different levels involved)" (ALFSV, 1997).

As mentioned previously, employees are involved in Sun's grantmaking selection process. Those who are interested in volunteering in this area are trained to read and

evaluate grant applications. They serve on a committee that recommends certain programs to the Foundation Board for support.

Ultimately, they [Sun employees] gain a deeper understanding of the foundation's philosophy and an appreciation of what it takes to be a responsible corporate citizen (Sun Microsystems, 1998, p.6).

Employees can impact other decisions, such as equipment grants, particularly if they are willing to provide the labor needed. As is clear from Gary Larks' story, an employee can sometimes influence the traditional decision making structure of the department by taking limited risks and being, as Lindstrom from the Evergreen Unified School District calls him, their "champion." Gary showed a level of commitment to wiring all the schools in his district, and Scott and Susan McNealy responded to his determination by offering things that may not have been made available to other volunteers.

Another way people from different levels of the company have gotten involved is by wiring schools during the first phase of Net Day. Gary Larks described the group as split into "blue collar" and "white collar" volunteers. The blue collar volunteers laid the wiring in the ceiling and physically linked the machines to the servers. The white collar group was responsible for making sure the software functioned and that the system communicated properly. Volunteers with different expertise prove most efficient when their activities match their professional skill set and background.

Sun employees can volunteer for a lead role as a School Liaison through Open Gateways or a Building Ambassador during a holiday gift drive, or they can pick more of a support role, assisting with Star Office training at a local school or pouring wine at a local jazz festival.

"6. Organize and Select Programs and Projects (narrow the program focus to meet manageable goals) and 7. Evaluate Your Efforts" (ALFSV, 1997).

Narrowing program goals goes hand-in-hand with evaluation. In order to assess progress, specific objectives should be set in advance and should align with the company's business philosophy. As CEO McNealy emphasizes, "We've tightened our [community involvement] focus by integrating our community and education programs more closely" (Sun Microsystems, 1998, p.1). One of the main requirements for working with particular schools is that they be located within a certain radius of one of Sun's campuses.

Sun's ultimate goal is to become the premiere computer network company in the world. Therefore, the "policy" surrounding community involvement is that it should strengthen Sun's position in the marketplace. For that reason, the most focused volunteer effort, Open Gateways, targets schools directly. Perhaps Sun expects that once the schools are networked, and staff is trained and given technical support at no cost, they will likely become loyal customers. When upgrades are needed, and new technology emerges, those schools may prefer to buy from Sun. It would appear that Sun is laying the groundwork for entire school districts to become Sun clients in the long term — a savvy investment for the company.

In order to better streamline disparate volunteer efforts, and likely to get better PR results, Sun meets a large part of its goal for volunteer hours through Worldwide Volunteer Week, which happens simultaneously in Scotland, Colorado, Massachusetts, and Great Britain. This blitz of volunteer projects is probably perceived by the public as having more of an impact than if the same number of projects was completed independently during the year. The aggregate number of hours (7,300) and projects (73) seem more impressive when presented as a concentrated week of effort.

The only stipulation for volunteer activities that are not closely related to the business of computer networking is that they be carried out in the vicinity of one of Sun's

campuses. This geographic focus can help enhance the company's reputation in the surrounding community.

Sun does set specific, longer term company goals in its Community Involvement Report:

As part of the America's Promise initiative... we have committed to donating more than 20,000 hours of volunteer time and \$5 million in equipment and training to schools by the year 2000 (Sun Microsystems, 1998, p.5).

Andrea Gooden explained that the America's Promise goal will be met through Open Gateways alone between 1997 and 2000. It does not factor in the other CAV volunteer projects or even the hours donated through Worldwide Volunteer Week.

I was told, "Let's make a promise." And this is my contribution. Through Open Gateways I could say, "We're going to do this [20,000 hours]. We'll be able to quantify that. And it turned out that the only thing that got picked up through America's Promise was the number for Open Gateways. But we're doing much more than that (1999).

Certainly if Sun is setting these goals and sharing them with key publics that will hold the company accountable, Sun needs to be able to measure its progress. Volunteer Center contractors do track both volunteer hours from Worldwide Volunteer Week and from Open Gateways. However, with individual volunteer efforts and one-time projects arranged through CAV, program managers focus only on providing the opportunities. They do not follow up to find out if the employee actually participated, and all of those hours go undocumented.

Because managing the program costs money, some return on investment must be calculated. The Volunteer Center contractors do measure the level of volunteer participation, including how many employees volunteer, for how many hours, and in which programs, how many inquiries about the program have come in from employees, and they count the number of team building projects that are run by team leaders. But

these measurements fit into the Process-based approach rather than the more cutting edge, Outcome-based approach to evaluation.

We are accountable as a department here just like the server group would be accountable. We have our own set of deliverables. We have our own set of goals. And we are held accountable for how good we are at doing what we do and whether or not we hit our targets, exceed our targets. And we are compensated accordingly (Serda, 1999).

The fact that the Worldwide Corporate Affairs department is evaluated by upper management along the same lines as other departments further cements the idea that Sun sees community involvement as a core business operation. But aside from tracking the number of hours and new inquiries, no one interviewed ever offered to *quantify* any of the benefits of the program with regard to the bottom-line.

Does Sun use outcome-based evaluation to measure the impact its volunteers have on non-profits? Perhaps it helps to think a level down from formal evaluation and use the word "feedback" instead. Since the managers of the program are contractors from local Volunteer Centers, they have established relationships with different non-profit organizations, and make contact often when planning volunteer projects. Through informal conversations, they provide feedback regarding what might be done better next time, as well as the successes of the project. And if it goes well, the organization will likely ask for Sun volunteers to come back — another way Jenny Girard says they can gauge the effectiveness of a project.

In the case of Open Gateways, an entire team of employees volunteers at a school site and may conduct as many as 12 teacher trainings involving the curriculum and the network. But when asked about how the impact of Open Gateways is measured, the researcher was told that specific tools for Outcome-based assessment of teacher training were currently being developed.

We are in the process, because we just started our grants to schools so we are going to have several levels of a survey and an assessment... probably with the whole team [teachers and volunteers]... There are going to be a variety of ways that we are going to have to assess in order to find out if we are making any kind of school change happen (Girard, 1999).

The school staff at Alvarado Elementary was only in its first week of training and had already developed their own Feedback Sheets to critique the training conducted by the Sun volunteers. If the sheets prove to be useful, they might be adapted by other volunteers and given to teachers at other participating schools to score their training. Another way that best practices and biggest challenges are being shared around Open Gateways is through monthly conference calls between all six of the Sun volunteer school liaisons who are involved in the training phase of the project.

According to volunteer Elena Ng (1999), if a team leader wants to send a survey to project participants to get feedback from Sun volunteers following a project, there are sample surveys available through Sun's internal network, although the sample survey was not designed with volunteer programs in mind. Volunteer Center contractor Ginger Whelan sent an electronic mail follow-up survey to all the participants in Ng's Worldwide Volunteer Week Project to solicit their input, but that did not appear to be standard procedure for every project.

Another way that Sun volunteers share their input is through the planning of new projects. With Open Gateways, volunteers who had participated in previous wiring projects met with current volunteers and advised them on challenges they might encounter. By sharing their experiences, the new team was able to avoid some pitfalls from earlier trials and be more efficient. Employee Gary Larks, a veteran of the Net Days and Open Gateways projects, explains how information was shared at various planning meetings.

The [Net Day] concept originally was that you go there the day of the event and do it all. You pull wire. Well, especially in some of these older schools you've got

asbestos and all of a sudden you've got a concrete wall... Did we plan for this? So they learned a lot from the first pre-Net Day... These are some of the horror stories I remember him [Gary Serda] telling us at our meetings (Larks, 1999).

At the Sun employee "train the trainers" workshop, one employee volunteer who had some experience training in an East Bay school shared some of her experiences with the other volunteers. She described how she asked one group of teachers to role play that they were fifth graders learning to access the internet for the first time so that the other group of teachers could practice training them. She asked them to select websites during the training that were relevant to their current curriculum so that they could see how the new technology could link to their current coursework. And she also suggested that other volunteers should come prepared with the school's website address so that teachers could visit that site on their first foray into cyberspace. At that same training, another employee shared his frustrations about how a school he had helped design a website for two years ago has never updated the site. The school had a problem with its server but never fixed it because the district employee who understood the system had left. And now there was only one employee in the entire district acting as systems administrator for 15 schools. Sharing these experiences helps prepare other volunteers for some of the challenges they might encounter working with different school districts. It may also help them adjust their expectations. While this may be an informal approach to evaluation, it has proved effective in Net Day and has been continued through Open Gateways.

Possible Weaknesses

According to Elena Ng, a Sun employee who volunteers once every other month and has managed projects as a team leader during Worldwide Volunteer Week, "Sun is a very big feedback company" (1999). Attempts are made to evaluate volunteer satisfaction, e.g. Ginger Whelan's electronic mail survey, but these efforts are not consistent for every project.

Other than electronic mail from pro-active employees and incidental conversations, Jenny Girard did not appear to use standard methods to solicit feedback from CAV and Worldwide Volunteer Week participants. By providing all employees with electronic mail access to her, she feels they always have a way to give input. She interacts with both employees and participating non-profit organizations to get their informal comments on various programs, and she is confident that if a project was not satisfactory to either side, someone would let her know. She seemed to have no established tools for soliciting employee feedback. By relying on haphazard communication, it is also difficult to evaluate progress in a particular area. Sun might benefit from being more pro-active in seeking and documenting volunteers' opinions about working with certain non-profits.

During Worldwide Volunteer Week, the contractors from the Volunteer Center have a major presence on-site at the various projects, and can get informal feedback from employees and non-profits during the event. Ng saw Girard from the San Mateo Volunteer Center several times during that week and offered input on the project she was managing. Finally, because the company disseminates information about the volunteer opportunities via electronic mail, it is very easy for employees to contact their team leader or the Volunteer Center Contractors with any concerns, questions or feedback. Because the intranet is so easily accessible, giving feedback can be instant and painless. It utilizes practices that are already part of the company culture to enable two-way communication between the volunteer program manager and its participants. The drawback here is that employees who don't feel strongly, either positively or negatively about a project, will not likely give their input. Surveys and focus groups may be the least biased approaches that Sun could use to collect employee feedback.

The staffing of the Worldwide Corporate Affairs department has changed over the past year, perhaps indicating a shift in focus toward a more strategic, K-12 focused

program. In 1998 the department eliminated the full-time state/local government program manager position. Andrea Gooden (1999) explained that there had also been "a program manager who all CAV coordinators around the country reported to" and that position has not been filled since 1998. That CAV manager was responsible for tracking the level of employee volunteer involvement from year to year, a duty that now falls to Gary Serda.

Although Andrea Gooden has accepted responsibility for tracking Open Gateways volunteer hours and has set a goal of 20,000 hours by the year 2000, Sun was criticized by Arianna Huffington in December of 1997 for not responding to the America's Promise questionnaire which asked for details on progress toward that goal.

The report [from American's Promise] shows a clear reluctance to name names and to hold accountable the commitment makers – especially corporations that already earned public relations points from associating with the Summit. These promise-makers have yet to be promise-keepers (Huffington, 1997).

Huffington's criticism was off the mark, according to Tara Greco, National Commitment Director of America's Promise. There was no formal deadline set for reporting in December, and Sun's Open Gateways was so new that there weren't many figures to report. There is no other indication that Sun has been delinquent in either achieving its goal or reporting its progress to America's Promise, since it has made that information public in its Community Investment Reports and on the America's Promise website for the past two years.

Tracking the Bottom-Line Benefits

The Worldwide Corporate Affairs department is held accountable for reaching certain goals, like the America's Promise commitment. It makes sure that best practices for a program are established at a pilot site before sharing them with other campuses. It arranges meetings to share feedback for Open Gateways as it did for Net Day. And Gary Serda says that he and others from his department conduct workshops sharing

their philosophy and programs with other peers in their field. They also get input from their peers at other companies.

We do practice continuous improvement and we are always looking for ways to make our programs better. And part of that is benchmarking our practices against other companies. So when we see a good idea, we implement it. The other part is that we are pretty open about sharing the work that we do. We'll do workshops (Serda, 1999).

Not surprisingly, Andrea Gooden described how the board of Sun's Foundation asks her to be accountable for how the programs it is funding are progressing. Because Sun's grantmaking incorporates volunteerism, she is responsible for meeting associated objectives. Holding Andrea accountable is only fair when the Foundation expects that same accountability and level of reporting from grantees, whether they receive cash, equipment or volunteer time.

When you are a member of a corporate philanthropic organization at a money making company, you are always mindful of return on investment. And not so much to say "How many workstations did we sell?", but as the Board put it to me... "We gave money to welfare moms to get them to work. Did that happen?".... "Did those grants really yield the results we wanted to see?" (Gooden, 1999).

Although Gary Serda and Andrea Gooden gave numerous examples of the business benefits including public relations and employee skill building, etc., when it came to contributing directly to profits, they offered no numbers. When asked if Gary's boss had ever requested that they show the bottom-line boost from their program, Gooden replied "They have never asked us how many computers have we sold" (1999).

Planning and Evaluating Volunteer Efforts in General

In the spring of 1997, volunteerism was being hyped every day in the media. Colin Powell was giving speeches, companies were pledging volunteer hours, and President Clinton was launching Americorps. But in the middle of all of the publicity shots, some journalists were raising questions. *Newsweek* devoted a cover story to volunteerism, asking "Is Volunteering A Waste of Time?", a *New York Times* article questioned

"Volunteers: Pro and Con - Do All These Efforts Make a Difference?", and *Newsweek* chimed in asking "Do Do-Gooders Do Much Good?" This media attention focused on the effectiveness of volunteer efforts in the United States and highlighted the dearth of rigorous evaluation.

Somewhere along the line it became accepted that getting volunteers was hard enough, and evaluating volunteers' progress would be a luxury. Evaluation could also be seen as a form of criticism of volunteers. And asking volunteers to do even more work by evaluating their work would be almost unthinkable. "Indeed, the very quality that makes volunteering so noble — the selflessness — undermines the efficiency of the market" (Gerson, 1997, p.30).

That attitude has certainly shifted. When Jenny Girard was asked why her role as program manager and liaison between the nonprofits and Sun is vital, she explained,

I think because you are asking people to give up their time to do something, it is very important to make that time worthwhile... The only reason we've gotten tens of thousands of hours of volunteering happening over 8 days is because we organize and plan for it. And because you are a volunteer, I don't think you deserve less. I think you deserve more of that planning time (1999).

What Sun may lack in quantitative data, it seems to make up for through its planning and "best practices" sharing. That does not mean that Sun should not continue to develop its own quantitative tools that tie volunteer efforts to the bottom line and that measure results on the organizations being served.

Sun's program does follow all of the ALFSV guidelines to some extent. But in documenting and quantifying feedback from the community, employees, and participating non-profit organizations (Step 1), the company could benefit from expanding its current assessment efforts. The level of company-wide commitment (Step 2) could be better demonstrated at the upper echelon. The goals of the program seem to be fairly clear (Step 3) but they could be measured more effectively if the desired outcomes were quantified. For example, a list of the total number of media impressions

by category could be tracked each quarter and a goal could be set for the following quarter.

Sun has been very effective in developing a criteria for granting or rejecting volunteer projects and/or grant requests (Step 4). And in that same vein, the program successfully involves employees from different levels of the company (Step 5). By working with the Volunteer Center and continuing to link projects to the overall business strategy, Sun is improving in its ability to narrow the focus of the program and achieve realistic goals (Step 6). By doing an even better job of evaluating the outcome of each project and the impact the project is having on employees, the community, the participating non-profit, and the corresponding media coverage, Sun could cement the the type of full-fledged program that the ALFSV guidelines envision.

CHAPTER V

Conclusions

Corporate community relations professionals are at a crossroads. They have accepted the fact that they need to be able to evaluate their programs and justify their importance to the company, and they have developed some useful assessment methods, but they are just beginning to develop the quantitative tools needed to calculate the bottom-line benefits of those programs. In October 1999, the Points of Light Foundation began seeking funding assistance from six corporate partners to support a joint research project with Boston College.

The aim is to develop an assessment tool to measure the business benefits of corporate volunteer programs, the actual bottom-line contribution. So there is some agreement among proponents of corporate volunteer involvement that these specialized tools are needed to further cement these programs.

Experts in this area anticipate that more and more companies will be expanding their level of community involvement. As Tara Greco, national commitments director at America's Promise, explains "they [corporate volunteer programs] are becoming socially acceptable, the norm in order for a business to operate in this country" (T. Greco, personal communication, October 1999). As these programs grow, the need for both quantitative and qualitative assessment tools will likely increase.

Until more of these tools are available, the most helpful information is in the form of best practices that companies have compiled. This data is available through organizations like Points of Light, America's Promise, the Center on Corporate Community Relations at Boston College, the American Leadership Forum, Volunteer Centers across the country, and through individual companies' websites and Community Investment Reports.

Sharing Sun's Best Practices

For the past two years, Sun Microsystems has consistently shared information about its volunteer program with America's Promise. Gary Serda, the Worldwide Corporate Affairs manager, contacts Greco at America's Promise "whenever he has anything new" (T. Greco, personal communication, October 1999). Once a year, Sun updates its progress toward its pledge of 20,000 hours of volunteer service by the year 2000 on the America's Promise website.

Overall, Sun was forthcoming with both information and interviews during this study. Sun staff from the volunteer program and the Worldwide Corporate Affairs department were willing to grant interviews and offered access to training sessions for Sun volunteers as well as teacher trainings for Open Gateways. This willingness to share information is in keeping with the company's information technology focus. Sun has ingrained the practice of using electronic mail and the Sun network to share information between its campuses, including lessons learned through volunteer projects. Recently, information about Sun's practice of using electronic mail to share information with the schools involved in Open Gateways has been posted at different volunteer-oriented sites around the internet. "There may be a Sun employee at home in Massachusetts in the early morning hours helping a student or teacher with a system problem in England," explains Gary Serda (<http://pj.org/vol/impact>). Since Sun is in the networking business, it is only natural that they should use that core competency to enhance their volunteer efforts globally. Indeed, The Points of Light Foundation has praised Sun's commitment to networking globally between its campuses, as well as its efforts in community involvement at all of its campuses worldwide.

The Points of Light profile of Sun's program compliments Sun's "use of innovative technology" for arranging details of programs, sharing best practices, and enabling two-

way communication and immediate feedback between employees and the volunteer center managers (The Points of Light Foundation, 1999).

Using the ALFSV Guidelines as an Assessment Tool

In the absence of any industry-sanctioned model, the ALFSV Guidelines provided a useful framework to examine Sun's volunteer program in-depth. Sun followed all seven to some degree, but the program could be even more effective if the company showcased company-wide commitment, was more pro-active in soliciting feedback from the community and employees regarding their needs from the volunteer program, and established stronger evaluation tools to measure the impact of their volunteer involvement, not just the number of hours contributed. Areas for improvement as well as key strengths of Sun's program emerged through the use of the ALFSV guidelines, and they will be discussed in more detail shortly.

The ALFSV guidelines are designed to be general, so that companies of all different sizes can use them. However, not enough emphasis is given to the importance of doing quantitative evaluation. Even in the expanded set of guidelines, the ALFSV evaluation section states "Consider whether to use qualitative and quantitative methods" (1998, <http://www.alfsv.org>). Throughout this study, the researcher has been convinced that all volunteer programs should utilize both qualitative and quantitative methods whenever possible to strengthen the evaluation. Also, in the expanded discussion of the guidelines, ALFSV encourages companies to measure the community impact but the suggested methods described are process-based instead of outcome-based. To succeed in proliferating the number of cutting-edge volunteer programs, these guidelines would need to provide specific suggestions for measuring the success of the volunteer efforts against specific objectives.

Summary of Sun's Program Strengths

On the basis of input coming from local Volunteer Centers, The Points of Light Foundation, and America's Promise, the researcher was convinced that Sun's commitment to its volunteer program is genuine and long-term in nature. These "outsiders" view it as a well-managed program, and judging from the level of planning and staff involved, the researcher believes that Sun's management understands the important role employee volunteerism plays in the company's overall business success.

Although Alex Billeb, corporate affairs manager at Points of Light said that hiring outside contractors was not a sanctioned best practice from her organization's point of view, the profile that Points of Light prepared describing Sun's volunteer program lists that mode of management as a key strength of Sun's program. Hiring an expert to orchestrate the details of the CAV and Worldwide Volunteer Week shifts the burden of identifying the current needs of the community and local non-profits to the Volunteer Centers who do have that expertise. This arrangement has an added business benefit for Sun, which can be quantified in "bottom-line" terms: Sun does not have these "experts" on its payroll, which means it does not pay for their benefits or their salaries. Instead Sun pays a fee to the Volunteer Centers and saves money by using "independent contractors."

In the same way that GE recognized that volunteer projects could bridge cultural gaps among employees following a merger (Weiss, 1990), Sun has utilized volunteer projects as a way to build department camaraderie and individual leadership skills. The Points of Light Foundation cites this "use of team leaders" as another strength of Sun's program, as well as Sun's tendency to select projects that showcase the company's unique capabilities in creating networks, enabling internet access, and maintaining such technology (1999).

One aspect of Sun's program that was touted by Gary Serda was its diversity of volunteer opportunities. As was borne out by the comments of several employee volunteers during interviews, this range of activities is a definite attribute of Sun's program. In addition to the 12 new projects offered each month, employees can always initiate a project with a non-profit of their choice. Having the flexibility to get involved in a project-by-project basis, or as a one-time group training, or with a long-term commitment like Open Gateways, enables employees to be pro-active and gives them access to resources managed by Volunteer Center experts.

Possible Areas for Development

As several "volunteer experts" confided to the researcher, it is difficult when your job is to advocate for volunteerism to then criticize the efforts of companies that are clearly committed to it. In an effort to be balanced and somewhat objective, Points of Light did suggest that Sun could improve three different aspects of its volunteer program. The profile stated that overall Sun has "a very strong workplace volunteer program" and that "not much is lacking" (1999). In the area of employee recognition, Points of Light suggested that Sun might consider holding an awards ceremony "to publicly recognize the efforts of outstanding volunteers." This sentiment was echoed at an Open Gateways volunteer training session by the volunteer trainer. Dana Ilari represents the outside organization which developed the training curriculum used by Sun volunteers with its partner schools. Ilari suggested that more attention to volunteer recognition might strengthen the program and that perhaps Sun should consider offering some "comp time." Worldwide Corporate Affairs has agreed that volunteering for Open Gateways requires a substantial commitment from employees (Serda, 1998; Gooden, 1999), but it seems unlikely that "comp time" will be offered unless Open Gateways volunteers communicate a strong desire for it, or if participation declines sharply in the program.

On-Site Cameo Appearances by Upper Management

It is the researcher's opinion that Sun's program could also benefit from more public "involvement" among Sun's key executives. The current level of "hands on" involvement at the highest echelon appears almost non-existent. And because the CAV projects are not tracked based on the volunteer employee's position at the company, e.g. senior manager, manufacturing, or administration, there is no way to calculate the level of upper management participation. Throughout the interviews, several requests were made for photos and articles showing CEO McNealy at volunteer events. No evidence was provided by the Worldwide Corporate Affairs department of McNealy taking a "hands-on" role at a volunteer project to demonstrate his support.

Although the department highlighted Scott McNealy's willingness to send electronic mail thank-yous and incorporate volunteerism into speeches at new sites, that level of commitment will not likely inspire involvement. Nevertheless, McNealy's commitment to Open Gateways, at least monetarily, is undisputed. He donated money from his own foundation to outfit Evergreen Unified School District with a complete set of Sun servers at the request of veteran volunteer employee Gary Larks.

While Gary Larks admitted that seeing McNealy on the "front lines" might reinforce the company's concern for the community, he also felt that upper management might not have the specific knowledge needed to conduct volunteer roles in Open Gateways, e.g., training teachers to use Star Office software or installing wiring in the ceiling of a local school.

Volunteer recruitment is still an area that could be improved, according to the Points of Light profile. Twenty percent of the company's employees have been logging between 14,000 and 20,000 hours of service in a year, which means that 80% of the employees do not actively participate in company-sponsored volunteer programs (1999). The researcher concurs with Points of Light that Sun could benefit both from a public

relations standpoint and enjoy increased employee involvement by having at least one high profile volunteer event where a recognized upper echelon employee volunteered. The Volunteer Center manager could monitor the levels of volunteerism before and after such publicized involvement to determine if it had any effect on enrollment in volunteer projects. Points of Light suggests that Sun might also conduct an in-depth assessment of employees' expectations of the volunteer program in order to generate involvement from a higher percentage of employees.

Can Any Company Adopt Sun's Model?

Even if a company identifies aspects of Sun's program it would like to adopt, such as the electronic mail infrastructure or hiring an outside contractor, there are some factors which may not be easily duplicated. First, Sun is a technology company that specializes in networking. The communication infrastructure is already in place and the culture has already embraced electronic mail and Sun's intranet as a way to share ideas and plan logistics. Second, Sun benefits with a tax deduction for donating products, which is an integral part of Open Gateways. Not every company manufactures products with enough shelf life to be donated, e.g. Dole bananas or prescription drugs. While Sun's software and hardware may need periodic upgrades, schools will not require the most recent version in order to accomplish their technology objectives.

The other key attribute that may set Sun apart is the fact that the company earns one billion dollars in revenues each year, has an estimated 29,669 employees, and a global presence. Smaller companies may not be able to afford using an outside contractor or may not have the budget to organize a volunteer recognition dinner. Having a substantial budget means that a full-time staff can be hired to support the company's community involvement, whereas in some companies one person may be responsible for planning projects, recruiting employees, grant-making, and generating any related publicity.

Sun Microsystems also links its volunteer efforts with its grantmaking guidelines, requiring those schools applying for Sun equipment to also have a plan for working with Sun volunteers. Those same schools are also eligible for cash grants through the Foundation. Companies that have not established a separate Foundation may not be able to offer this three-tiered assistance.

Meeting But Not Always Measuring the Business Objectives

The key business objectives that emerged through this study appear to be employee recruitment and retention, enhanced community and public relations, employee skill building, and customer base expansion. There is evidence through the in-depth interviews that all four of these objectives are being achieved to a degree, but no rigorous quantification is possible with the information Sun provided. For example, Elena Ng is certain that the volunteer program builds loyalty among employees, but Jenny Girard of the Volunteer Center does not have survey results from the 20% of regular employee volunteers to support Elena's assumption. While Elena's opinion is valid for this case study, it cannot be seen as representing the views of all Sun volunteers.

And while it is accepted that volunteering in the community will likely improve Sun's reputation as a corporate citizen, Sun doesn't appear to track the articles published about its community involvement in a systematic way. Efforts to publicize Sun's volunteerism are generated by the Volunteer Centers locally. The company's PR department is focused on coverage involving products, stock price, annual revenues, acquisitions, and other financial news. No figures are apparently available showing an increase in Sun's volunteer-related press coverage over the last five years during Worldwide Volunteer Week.

Volunteer Center managers do track the number of department volunteer projects that the company organizes each year. Current participation in these projects suggests that

managers see the value in them. Benefits include enhanced project management skills and, in the case of Open Gateways, increased employee productivity through familiarization with a particular software program. Sun could quantify the increase in those department-led projects and could conduct a survey with participating employees asking what each employee feels he/she gained professionally from the project. Individually, these volunteer teams may conduct surveys, but that information is not readily available through the Worldwide Corporate Affairs department and is not publicized in any current materials.

Sun tracks the number of volunteer hours carefully during Worldwide Volunteer Week and through Open Gateways. The Volunteer Center also tracks the number of employee inquiries about volunteer opportunities. Between 1997 and 2000, Open Gateways will log at least 20,000 employee volunteer hours. Since the beginning of Sun's involvement with Net Day, Andrea Gooden estimates that Sun has helped to wire 500 schools. During Net Day, Gooden estimates that 1,000 Sun employees are involved, and close to 300 are involved worldwide throughout the rest of the year (1999). Approximately 2,000 employees at Sun's U.S. companies volunteered 7,600 hours at local schools and their efforts affected 25,000 students. As the pilot training phase has come to an end, Gooden has begun tracking the number of hours that Sun employees have volunteered training teachers to use the Star Office software and how to enhance their curricula using the internet.

One could argue that being present in so many different school districts not only has an obvious public relations benefit but it also helps to expand the consumer base for the future. In the same way that Hewlett-Packard pioneered the practice of donating H-P calculators to K-12 students, Sun is now donating software, desktop machines, and servers that teachers, students, and district systems administrators will become comfortable with, and will likely continue to use. But unlike H-P's calculators, Sun

servers operate in the background, so students will only see the Sun brand name associated with software or desktop machines donated by Sun.

Andrea Gooden has never been asked by her supervisor to calculate how many desktop computers have sold as a result of Open Gateways. And it may take ten years before those students grow up and decide to purchase Sun equipment in their homes. Other than conducting a marketing survey asking for the students' impressions of Sun before and after an equipment donation or a training, there would be no other obvious way to assess this kind of potential impact. And conducting such a survey would be such a blatant marketing move that schools would likely distrust Sun's volunteer efforts, finding them too self-serving.

Upper management may not ask for quantitative, bottom-line oriented results for the volunteer program, but according to Tara Greco, national commitment director for America's Promise, they will in the future (T. Greco, personal communication, October 1999). One might argue that it is because Sun's executives are so committed to community involvement that they do not require the Worldwide Corporate Affairs to justify the program's worth in dollars. To them, perhaps the business benefits are obvious. But some companies may not have that kind of leadership or they may not have the financial stability that Sun has enjoyed over the past ten years.

For example, a middle-size technology company that faces a serious downturn due to a parts shortage resulting from an earthquake in Taiwan may have to start looking for places to cut costs, and often executives look to community relations as a place to reduce expenses. Since no one can guarantee the future of the U.S. economy, every business needs to know how to quantify the positive impact its volunteer program is having on the bottom line. When those numbers are not available, a strong case will still have to be made using qualitative data including survey results, press coverage analysis, and interviews with members of key publics.

One interesting business advantage of Open Gateways is that the bugs in the current software, Star Office, are being identified during the teacher training and are then being communicated back to Sun's product development people so they can incorporate those improvements into the next version of Star Office. In this way, product improvements through field trials are being identified without causing Sun to appear self-serving.

With Sun's program, the closer a volunteer initiative is linked to the business strategy, the more carefully it is tracked and implemented. Hours volunteered through the CAV program to projects which the Volunteer Center does not coordinate are not even tracked. These hours are not a focused part of Sun's business strategy so they are not subjected to analysis. In contrast, when Sun began the training phase of Open Gateways, it was handled like any other product roll-out. The program was tested first at a pilot school and feedback was given to other volunteers before they expanded efforts to other schools. The number of volunteer hours are being tracked carefully for all Open Gateways projects, as well as the dollar value of equipment donated at each school.

No matter how many ways the question was asked, the researcher could not get anyone to discuss existing methods of quantifying the Return on Investment. Although Gary Serda said his department is accountable for certain deliverables (1998) and Andrea Gooden explained that they have to demonstrate they have achieved set objectives through their grantmaking (1999), every time bottom-line value was mentioned, the conversation was steered to a broader topic. There are three possible reasons for this: 1) Sun doesn't conduct that level of analysis for its volunteer programs; 2) Sun does calculate Return on Investment but does not publicize those numbers because the company fears it would reflect badly on Sun, making the company out to be chasing profits instead of genuinely lending a hand in the community; or 3) Upper management doesn't require "return on investment" statistics because the other kinds of analysis the department conducts satisfy the business objectives. This third option seems most likely

after conducting this inquiry, but it still may be wise for Sun to develop its own quantitative tools or adopt them from other companies as they evolve over the next few years, especially if it wants to keep pace with trends in the industry.

Selling a Philosophy: A Long-Term Vision

The researcher was convinced that Sun's goal is broader than converting classrooms to using Star Office software. In fact, Sun was using Star Office as the software for its teacher training before the product was even owned by Sun. Sun is looking at a much larger shift in the consumer mindset which may not be measurable yet. Sun's Worldwide Corporate Affairs department feels it is "selling a philosophy" (Gooden, 1999). Sun is trying to influence consumer preference away from personal computers and more toward network computers. It is selling networking as the technology of the future. Instead of upgrading individual machines, all maintenance will be done at a central server and the ability to share information and resources will be greatly enhanced. By showing how this network capability can help a school to flourish through Open Gateways, Sun is providing a forum for local schools to become comfortable with network computing, and ultimately become customers, purchasing networking equipment and software.

One other reason for a lack of available bottom-line oriented data may be that since Sun sees all of its departments as critical to its business strategy, it views its volunteer benefits analysis as proprietary. Whereas it is willing to tell other companies about how it uses electronic mail to communicate logistics to volunteers or offer surveys to project participants, calculations regarding profit may be held closer to the vest.

Source Objectivity

As Michael Stevenson, librarian at the Boston College Center on Corporate Relations explained, "Data available on volunteer programs is haphazard at best" (M. Stevenson, personal communication, 1998). Because of that, there is a limited number of

organizations who focus on this area of interest and, depending on their relationship with a company, they may or may not be able to provide an unbiased opinion about that company's program. For instance, Sun is a member of The Points of Light Foundation, and as Alex Billeb explains, it is not the Foundation's role to criticize company's efforts. They prefer to highlight the positive practices and share them with other companies. To be fair, the Foundation did provide suggestions for improvement, but it must be remembered that Sun is a paying "client."

In the case of America's Promise, Sun is viewed positively for its level of commitment, for the impact of Open Gateways, and for that way that Sun prefers to focus its energies on developing its training program rather than publicizing it.

By launching volunteer efforts like Open Gateways using a pilot school, Sun can assess and adjust the process before it rolls out the program to the other Sun campuses, a practice which America's Promise also supports. One has to bear in mind, however, that America's Promise considers its relationship with Sun a client-service partnership. Since America's Promise is privately funded, it does not charge corporate partners any fees. The organization sees its role as helping companies gain publicity around their volunteer efforts and sharing resources with its partners through an extensive database. Even without charging a fee, the relationship America's Promise has with Sun makes it unlikely that a completely unbiased opinion could result. America's Promise is a champion of corporate volunteer programs, and as such, is unlikely to highlight any negative aspects that could detract from a company's program or corporate volunteerism in general.

Future Studies

Ultimately corporate community relations is a subject area in which academia could provide a very useful service. Studies conducted by students and faculty who have no relationship to the companies involved are able to be objective. There is potential for

numerous other studies to be done and the need for developing quantitative tools is being promoted currently through volunteer-oriented agencies. Once an effective assessment tool has been designated, that tool can be used to compare programs from a number of different companies. This would enable Sun's program to be compared against programs at other companies with similar size and revenues, instead of being compared against a set of ideal guidelines. It would be possible to rank the effectiveness of volunteer programs at different companies, for example, or to determine which ones have the highest percentage of employee involvement, or the highest number of hours volunteered per year.

Non-profits and For-Profits Further Intertwine

According to Pam Cook, director of corporate community relations for Clorox Corporation, one thing that characterizes partnerships between non-profits and companies is that they are becoming increasingly strategic. Partnerships have to tie in with the company's business strategy in specific ways (P. Cook, personal communication, October 1999).

As companies become more strategic in their community involvement, especially with their relationships to non-profits, these partners become more and more intertwined. The same kinds of assessment tools that companies are using to measure results of grants given through the company foundation are now being adopted by those same companies to measure results of their volunteer programs. And by devoting staff time and budget to assessment, the level of impact for all aspects of community involvement programs should increase. Companies can benefit from the wealth of knowledge that foundations and other grantmaking entities have been amassing to evaluate success of grantees.

By the same token, the quantitative, bottom-line business approach that companies adhere to in order to assess performance for stockholders can be adapted to help

strengthen volunteer program assessment that may otherwise seem vague and unsubstantiated.

Current Trends in Silicon Valley Giving

At a National Society of Fundraising Executives (NSFRE) seminar in October 1999, a panel of community relations professionals from the Bay Area discussed trends in local giving. In addition to the increasing strategic nature of such partnerships with non-profits, PG&E's Manager of Corporate Contributions, Dan Quigley, explained that companies expect to receive substantial recognition for their contributions, whether they be financial or volunteer efforts or donated services. So not only is recognition important to volunteers at an individual level, companies want to receive some "credit" in the public relations arena for being a good corporate citizen. "We have to justify the bottom line reason for any dollar going out" (D. Quigley, personal communication, October 1999). He encourages non-profits to use their creativity when applying for corporate assistance, especially in the area of recognition. Finally, Ursula Surgalski, Manager - Worldwide Community and University Affairs at Applied Materials, cautions that the size of the company has a major effect on its philanthropic capacity. Because of the current level of competition in the computer industry, Surgalski points out that "Middle size companies are so busy getting ready to be bought that they don't have time to think about philanthropy" (U. Surgalski, personal communication, October 1999).

An Outside Opinion on Partnering with Sun

Sun's program strengths were highlighted by Phyllis Lindstrom, assistant superintendent - educational services at Evergreen School District in San Jose. Lindstrom's district has been fully wired and outfitted with servers from Sun Microsystems through an ongoing Net Day partnership that has lasted several years. Throughout this endeavor, Lindstrom was impressed with how Sun focused substantial attention on planning each aspect of the volunteer projects (1999). For Open Gateways

and Net Day, Sun has launched a pilot project first to work out any kinks and major challenges. Following the pilot, volunteers hold meetings and share "lessons learned" with participating Sun campuses. These pre-project efforts increase the productivity and efficiency of volunteer time. Using a volunteer's time effectively is a major determinant in a volunteer's decision to return to assist a particular agency again (Girard, 1999).

Limitations of Partnering with Technology Companies

One of the drawbacks of forging partnerships with technology companies, according to Lindstrom, is that schools aren't always staffed with people who are as technology-savvy as the company whose equipment has been donated (1999). Servers may not be operating efficiently and teachers may not know enough about conducting web research to teach their students. Upgrades may be needed and the school district Information Specialist may not know how to implement them. But with Sun, Lindstrom feels that even after the immediate goals, such as wiring a district, have been met, the company maintains a long-term commitment. There is a support structure,

a whole division, a department headed by Gary Serda, committed to this. And it was a really pleasant surprise....our technological expertise is not very deep but we know that we have someone behind us with that expertise... even if we don't fall back on it, it's a safety net (1999).

Final Notes

Sun does assess its progress against the business objectives of its volunteer program, even if they are not always bottom-line focused. And the breadth of Sun's volunteer program is admirable. The feedback from corporate volunteer organizations about Sun's program has been positive, and the company's commitment observed by the researcher appears to be genuine and very well organized. The company has successfully integrated community involvement into the culture, and commitment from John Gage and Scott McNealy is historically strong, though perhaps not widely publicized. Certainly there are areas that Sun could improve and if the company feels the criticism is

valid, it will likely implement those suggestions for improvement. Overall, the company was forthcoming with information and access and was willing to provide the researcher with available resources. If Sun does conduct quantitative analysis and has been protecting that information, it could help the industry by sharing its methods of measurement. If it does not assess bottom line impact, it could strengthen its program by tracking specific ways volunteerism enhances profits and how the program impacts the organizations it serves.

Although Sun's program cannot be adopted as a perfect model which any company can plug into and adapt, a number of practices emerged that fit the suggested guidelines of the ALFSV. What is needed now are the quantitative tools so that in the future, corporate community relations professionals are prepared to justify their programs and budgets, even if upper management claims to understand the program's importance. Once these quantitative methods are honed, multiple case studies can be conducted and companies can be compared against their peer companies in the industry. By continuing to share the results Sun has seen in its various volunteer efforts, other companies can make better decisions about what works well for a company of their particular size in their particular industry. By maintaining the staff and the level of resources Sun currently devotes to its community involvement, the company can be a proponent of such activities and a catalyst for other companies to establish their own corporate volunteer programs.

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APPENDIX

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