



The Conference Board Research Working Group Project Summary

Communicating Social Impact

Research Question: *How do corporations authentically and effectively communicate the impact and successes of their social programs to their internal and external stakeholders?*

Research Proposal

Most multinational corporations are committed to Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and have embedded its principles into their daily operations. This commitment typically incorporates a broad range of actions from corporate social investments designed to support communities through contributions and volunteerism, to shared value initiatives, to good governance, to increased supply chain accountability. Many of these efforts aim to achieve significant social impact for local and global communities.

Effective corporate communication of social programs is more important than ever as stakeholders such as customers, regulators, shareholders and employees have increasingly high expectations for the behaviors of corporations; and want access to information about multinational corporations' social policies and impacts. Yet, these important intentions and accomplishments are often under recognized. Both communications and corporate citizenship professionals are challenged with how best to publicize positive aspects and serious social engagements to a skeptical audience, while being authentic as opposed to PR driven.

The Conference Board has been leading a series of Research Working Groups (RWG) with leading Fortune 500 companies to study the impact of their corporate social investments. Building on the findings of the previous two groups, [Corporate Philanthropy with a Global Footprint](#) and [Measuring the Impact of Corporate Social Investments](#), **The Conference Board is launching a new working group that will focus on Communicating Social Impact.** This project will bring together CSR, philanthropy professionals with their corporate communications counterparts to examine effective, multi-stakeholder outreach campaigns. The group will address the following questions:

- How do you manage a tasteful balance of communicating successes of social investment programs without overselling them?
- How do you address the difference between reporting and telling a story (GRI guideline reporting versus a web-based, interactive CSR report, versus social media campaigns)?
- How do you manage multilateral partnerships through effective communication campaigns directed at customers, investors, and employees? What risks need to be addressed?
- How do you bring and align all internal stakeholder together responsible for CSR communications (such as internal branding and corporate communications and marketing groups, employee communications/HR, Sustainability committees, Foundations, etc)?
- How do you engage different audiences that are interested in and require different types of information about a company's CSR initiatives (i.e. a potential supplier or B2B customer versus a consumer, versus shareholders, versus local government officials versus prospective and current employees)?

What is a Research Working Group?

A Research Working Group (RWG) is a collaborative project that convenes peer companies and researchers in a rapid deep dive and targeted focus on a compelling business issue. When firms across industries with similar concerns come together and are guided by subject matter experts, there is a rich transfer of ideas and knowledge. The results include actionable insights and benchmarking throughout the duration of the project, and conclude with a comprehensive report designed to shape a platform for enterprise-wide action and impact.

Format & Takeaways

Timing: Launching Spring 2014, this Research Working Group will convene for 6 months. The group will meet 3 times in-person to share their own practices and challenges in a confidential, hands-on environment. The participants typically commit 2-4 hours a month to the project, outside of the in-person meetings.

Deliverables: RWG member companies will develop both concrete approaches as well as contributing to new thought leadership in this arena. By participating, your team will develop useful new strategies throughout the working group; they will have access to subject matter experts and be able to benchmark with like-minded companies. This collaboration will result in a report comprising detailed findings, conclusions, and recommendations for action. Each working group selects the deliverable formats that will have the most impact into their corporations ranging from a series of short, focused Executive Action reports to in-depth Research reports, case studies and surveys. Groups often prepare webcasts, and other media to share their findings with their colleagues to drive impact into their corporation.

Participation fee: A research contribution of \$18,500 enables two executives to participate and have access to all research, subject matter experts, peer benchmarking and reports. This fee covers materials and meals during in-person all meetings, but does not include travel & hotel to in-person meetings. RWGs are only open to member companies of The Conference Board. \$4,000 courtesy reduction in the full contribution will be extended to companies that hold a membership in one of The Conference Board's Councils on Corporate Contributions I & II, Communications I & II, Internal Communications and Social Media

To join or for further information, please contact Irene Sobol, Senior Manager of Research Working Groups: Irene.Sobol@conference-board.org or 212-339-0408.

The Conference Board meetings are held under the Chatham House Rule: Participants are free to use the information received, but neither the identity nor the affiliation of the speaker(s), nor that of any other participant, may be revealed. During the writing of the report, any attribution to specific companies or individuals will be secured in writing before publication.

The Conference Board is a global, independent business membership and research association working in the public interest. Our mission is unique: to provide the world's leading organizations with the practical knowledge they need to improve their performance and better serve society. The Conference Board is a non-advocacy, not-for-profit entity holding 501 (c) (3) tax-exempt status in the United States of America.