

# Good Works Are Expected Of Today's Corporations

(NAPSA)—A growing number of America's corporations and consumers think it's important for a company to be a good citizen. Experts say corporate social responsibility is on the rise and is expected to increase, given that today's savvy consumers expect companies to give back to the community—and in ways that go beyond merely cutting a check.

According to a survey conducted by Robert Half Management Resources, 76 percent of chief financial officers polled said that social responsibility programs such as volunteer community service are somewhat or very important to their corporation. Executives are finding that there is more to social corporate responsibility than solely donating money.

Bradley K. Googins, executive director of The Center for Corporate Citizenship at Boston College, notes "today's standards of excellence in corporate citizenship go beyond financial contribution. A company's capacity to benefit society is based on its ability to leverage its people to participate voluntarily to contribute to societal well-being."

One such company that understands the importance of giving back to the community is Dallas-based Alliance Data. The company has an in-depth relationship with Special Care & Career Services (SCCS), a nonprofit organization that supports children and adults with developmental disabilities by providing key services through two age-determined programs: Early Childhood Intervention and Supported Employment Services.

Alliance Data has a multifaceted relationship with the organization, whereby the company provides financial support and volunteer support, employs SCCS clients, and offers guidance to the agency through Board and committee involvement.



**Alliance Data employees in Lenexa, Kan., volunteer their time to help the local Habitat for Humanity chapter. The company encourages employees to volunteer—on company time—and promotes giving back to the community as a company value.**

"The partnership we share with Alliance Data exemplifies the real potential that can be achieved when a nonprofit organization and a corporate entity collaborate to achieve common goals," said Cathy Packard, executive director of Special Care & Career Services. "Our comprehensive relationship has resulted in mutual rewards and is shifting the paradigm in our industry for what defines a strong, effective corporate partner." Packard also noted that in a survey from the University of Massachusetts Center for Social Development & Education, researchers found that out of a random selection of 803 consumers from across the U.S., 92 percent felt more favorable toward companies that hire people with disabilities. Similarly, 87 percent of respondents said they would prefer to give their business to such companies.

Companies are realizing that in order to be an effective corporate partner, they need to have a formal strategy in place for community involvement. Alliance Data initiates a three-pillar approach, which provides the framework for what the company

calls its Neighbor of Choice community relations program. The areas of involvement include health & welfare, education and civic enrichment.

In each of its office locations nationwide, Alliance Data empowers its employees to actively identify and participate in local charitable and nonprofit activities that fall within those three pillars—and that are based on individual community needs.

The company recognizes the importance of engaging its employees on a personal level and supports the employees' desire to give back to the communities in a way that is most meaningful and fulfilling to them. Activities have included:

- The Polar Bear Plunge: Employees annually collected pledges for Special Olympics by plunging into the freezing waters of a local lake.

- Prom Shop Project: Employees and their families donate gently used formal wear and accessories to underprivileged high school students for the prom.

- Community Care Day: Employees at various Alliance Data locations volunteer to work on community projects that benefit local disadvantaged neighborhoods.

- United Way: Each year, Alliance Data conducts a companywide United Way Campaign to support local United Way agencies in the areas that it operates.

In order to set themselves apart, corporations are realizing that there's a societal expectation for companies to be active and responsible corporate citizens in the communities in which they operate. There are many ways for corporations to give back to their local communities and to do more than provide support financially. Alliance Data is one example of how companies contribute in creative and interesting ways.

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*Note to Editor: Please note that Alliance Data, an organization mentioned in this article for its community outreach efforts, may be located in your backyard. Alliance Data locations include: Boston; New York; Tampa; Cincinnati; Columbus; Nashville; Kansas City, Kansas; Atlanta; Tampa, Florida; Tulsa; Dallas; San Antonio; Denver; Scottsbluff, Nebraska; Seattle; and Bend, Oregon.*