



When events “give back”: Adding charitable elements to meeting plans

June 6, 2018

Good things can happen when people come together. This is as true for the boardroom as it is for charitable initiatives, and it's a truth that's inspiring organizations to make “giving back” a focus in their meeting and event plans.

“Why not leverage a positive group environment where attendees are already brought together to achieve a common goal?” affirms Paula Racher, Account Director with Niagara Falls Business Events (NFBE). “The unifying effect of completing a CSR (corporate social responsibility) component at a conference can bolster its themes or messaging and help set the tone for the event.”

No doubt, presenting a cheque at the end of an event is always a welcome touch. However, embedding charitable activities within the event itself is likely to make a more lasting impression on everyone involved.

“People are more likely to remember the conference and its message if you leave them with a feeling that they have done something good for someone else,” says Shannon Valeriotte, also an Account Director with NFBE, noting further, “The added benefit is it can also create a positive spin for companies in that they get their brand or name out there and have it be associated with something benevolent or philanthropic.”

There are more than a few ways to include “giving back” in an event’s itinerary. Ideas range from challenging guests to assemble emergency or hygiene kits for those in need, organizing charity marathons or sports tournaments, setting up volunteer opportunities at a charity or food bank, or syncing up with an existing non-profit group.

Both Racher and Valeriotte have helped many Niagara Falls groups connect with local causes and get ideas like these off the ground. In a recent example, a representative from Habitat for Humanity Niagara’s “Stud Club” worked with an event’s attendees to decorate studs that would -

- be incorporated into future Habitat for Humanity homes. In another, attendees were given the opportunity to donate gloves to a nearby mission during a Tourism Partnership of Niagara Lunch + Learn session in Ottawa.

"I hand delivered 92 pairs of gloves to The Ottawa Mission on a blustery day and they were very much appreciated," Racher recalls, adding, "We all found it rewarding to give folks a hand, so to speak."

Initiatives like these require extra planning but are always worth the effort. Tips for success include:

- **Know your group:** Plan charitable activities that connect to your group's skills, abilities, and interests. "If you're a group of engineers, why not have them assemble bikes for youth? Make it something that the community needs" Valeriotte suggests.
- **Connect the message:** A common mistake event planners make is failing to tie the goals or objectives of their meeting into the charitable element of the event. "If it doesn't make sense to delegates why they're doing what they're doing, the whole meaning behind the charitable element can get lost," says Valeriotte.
- **Make time:** "If you are integrating a CSR component, ensure the timing of it makes sense for the destination and that sufficient time to complete the task is allocated," suggests Racher. "If your objective is to go off-site to contribute to a local initiative, Sunday morning might not be the best time."
- **Mark the occasion:** Consider giving attendees a memento from the activity to re-enforce the message and make a lasting memory. Valeriotte recommends: "You might want to send delegates a picture or a note from the people who received the assistance, letting those delegates know how much of a difference they made."

Incorporating a "give back" element to your event might take work and a little extra planning. With help from destination reps and support from organizational leaders, though, the results can enrich attendees' experiences and make a genuine difference in the community.

"Everyone's lives are busy, and while many of us mean to contribute to our community, we might not get around to doing it," Racher offers. "If conference planners do their groups the favour of incorporating a CSR component, this could give them the spark they've needed to become more charitable in their home cities and beyond."

Paula Racher and Shannon Valeriotte are Account Directors with Niagara Falls Business Events. For more information, visit www.fallsmetings.com.

Original Article: www.corporatemeetingsnetwork.ca/2018/06/06/events-give-back-adding-charitable-elements-meeting-plans/