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From this week's Focus

Employers put new focus on staff involvement in corporate-giving efforts

By: Meg McSherry Breslin August 15, 2011

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Nicole Robinson is director of corporate community involvement at Kraft Foods Inc., which has created a company food garden.

Photo by: Stephen J. Serio

their surplus crops.

Kraft also developed a company food garden at its Northfield headquarters campus this year. The 8,000-square-foot garden, built in collaboration with the Chicago Botanic Garden, is expected to produce roughly 14,000 pounds of food to be donated to local agencies, including soup kitchens and food pantries.

"Agriculture has long been viewed as a solution or a tool in the fight against hunger," says Nicole Robinson, Kraft's director of corporate community involvement. "We're just looking at new ways to solve old problems."

Kraft's work appears to mirror national trends. Instead of underwriting special events or fundraisers, companies are increasingly zeroing in on causes that most reflect their corporate missions, says Edith Falk, who chairs the Glenview-based Giving USA Foundation.

"They're looking for broader and deeper partnerships that go beyond cash," Ms. Falk says. "They're spending more and more time defining their goals and spending more time looking for partners to advance those goals."

Valerie Lies, president and CEO of the Chicago-based Donors Forum, sees an increasing number of firms donating professional services to non-profits rather than increasing their cash contributions and event sponsorships.

"Sometimes, they're donating work for a marketing project or maybe even helping with a process change. It's not just coming in one day and everybody painting a school," Ms. Lies says. "The companies are trying to be creative about where they can put their resources where it really matters."

PRO BONO

Global accounting and advisory firm Deloitte LLP has been stepping up efforts to let employees donate time to charities and non-profits. Over the past three years, employees firmwide have completed nearly 300 projects valued at \$50 million.

"In the last several years, we've revised our approach to doing pro bono work," says Deborah DeHaas, Deloitte's Chicago-based Midwest regional managing partner. "We're treating it exactly like we would any client, in that we've formalized our processes and we enter into an engagement letter with the organization."

Ms. DeHaas says Deloitte is also deploying more dollars toward educational causes. A program launched by the company this year awarded a total of \$450,000 in grants to organizations working on education reforms, such as improving high-school graduation rates and enhancing college readiness.

New York-based J. P. Morgan Chase & Co. also is focused on skills-based volunteering and finding creative ways to get more employees engaged. Joining with Innovations for Learning, an Evanston-based non-profit that develops technology to improve education, more than 450 of the bank's employees now tutor children over the Internet. Tutors are reaching local schools in Chicago, Detroit, Miami and New York.

Bank employees volunteer 30 minutes per week, working with the same child to improve reading skills. The children speak by phone while viewing their stories on computer screens.

"It's so effective, and it's so easy for them to participate," says Francee Harrington, who leads the bank's corporate responsibility work.

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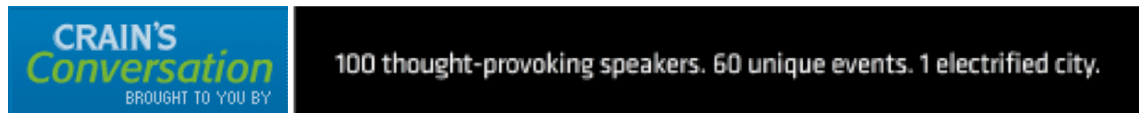
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