

Corporate Peer Discussions: Employee Engagement in Covid-19 Recovery and Demands for Racial Equity

Summary of Best Practices on Corporate Response

Virtual convenings held on June 16, 17, 18 2020

Convening Organizations: ACCP, CECP, COF, and POL

Association of Corporate Citizenship Professionals (ACCP), Council on Foundations (COF), Chief Executives for Corporate Purpose (CECP), and Points of Light (POL), which collectively represent more than 400 of the most socially and environmentally responsible global companies, are joining forces to support leaders of corporate purpose and to advocate for the field by convening dialogue on relevant solutions and to share best practices. While some companies are still assessing their response, we have already seen hundreds of corporations respond to the COVID-19 crisis and national unrest related to racial inequity with courage and determination. Their leadership sets an example for the sector to follow. In the sessions on Employee Engagement in Covid-19 Recovery and Demands for Racial Equity, 47 member companies participated.

Key Themes and Best Practices

This series of calls focused upon the compounding crises of the Covid-19 pandemic and a national movement for racial justice. As the immediate response to needs caused by Covid-19 shifts to rebuilding and economic recovery, companies are simultaneously stepping up to show support for anti-racism and foster opportunities for dialogue on racial justice within their companies. A recent [Fortune 500 CEO Survey](#) finds that 26.2% of CEOs never expect their employees to return to the usual workplace and nearly 90% of CEOs agree with the Business Roundtable statement emphasizing companies' responsibility to various stakeholders. In these challenging times, companies are needing to let go of certainty, with significant change still possible with hurricane season and Elections.

Key themes across the calls on Employee Engagement in Covid-19 Recovery and Demands for Racial Equity include:

Covid-19 Recovery

- Challenges with virtual volunteerism
- Uncertainty around return to in-person volunteering
- Being mindful about asks of employees during a challenging time
- Pushing for increase in philanthropic investment

Racial Equity Response

- Corporate statements and policy changes
- Elevating Employee Resource Groups (ERGs)
- Making space for challenging conversations
- Philanthropic investments for racial justice
- Internal alignment of efforts
- Opportunity for Civic Engagement
- Coalitions and joint action

Further details on each of these areas can be found on the following pages. Summaries from past call series focused on areas of corporate response to COVID-19 are available through the four partner organizations.

Challenges with virtual volunteerism

- In March, companies abruptly halted their in-person volunteer events and shifted to virtual with mixed success. Activities like making masks, sending letters to the elderly, and others have created engagement, as have virtual mentoring, but overall companies feel that more needs to be done to deepen impact.
- As they go forward, companies would like to do more skills based volunteering and pro bono service virtually. There could be an opportunity to help nonprofits develop virtual volunteering capacity.
- Most available virtual volunteering projects are US centric, and companies are looking for more guidance and opportunities for global footprint.
- Tracking of virtual volunteerism has been inconsistent.
- [Give2Get](#) has an at-home volunteering program that sends custom boxes of volunteer kits to employees with pre-addressed envelopes to deliver to the nonprofits and will host a virtual event for team building.
- Some companies have pledged volunteer or pro bono hours supporting causes related to racial equity.

Uncertainty around return to in-person volunteering

- Planning is beginning for return to in-office work and in-person volunteering, but uncertainty abounds. One company asked its leadership to add volunteerism into part of the re-opening plan to determine the necessary steps and re-entry training to resume in-person volunteering.
- Companies are shifting to a year-round menu of volunteer options rather than days of service and seeking additional ways to keep the culture tight and engaged.
- POL has developed a resource, [Guidelines for In-Person Volunteering during Covid-19](#).
- Companies are considering bringing in-person volunteering onsite in a distributions center rather than going out in the community to create a more controlled environment.
- For those employees that are volunteering in person with a nonprofit, registering directly with the nonprofit removes some liability to the company.

Being mindful about asks of employees during a challenging time

- During the response to Covid-19 and the movement for racial equity, focused employee giving campaigns have been the norm with increased matching and dollars for doers investments.
- Some companies report mixed uptake from employees on their giving campaigns.
- Companies are sensitive to asking too much of employees currently with the economic toll, social injustice focus, emotional burden, and childcare constraints that many employees are facing.

Pushing for increase in philanthropic investment

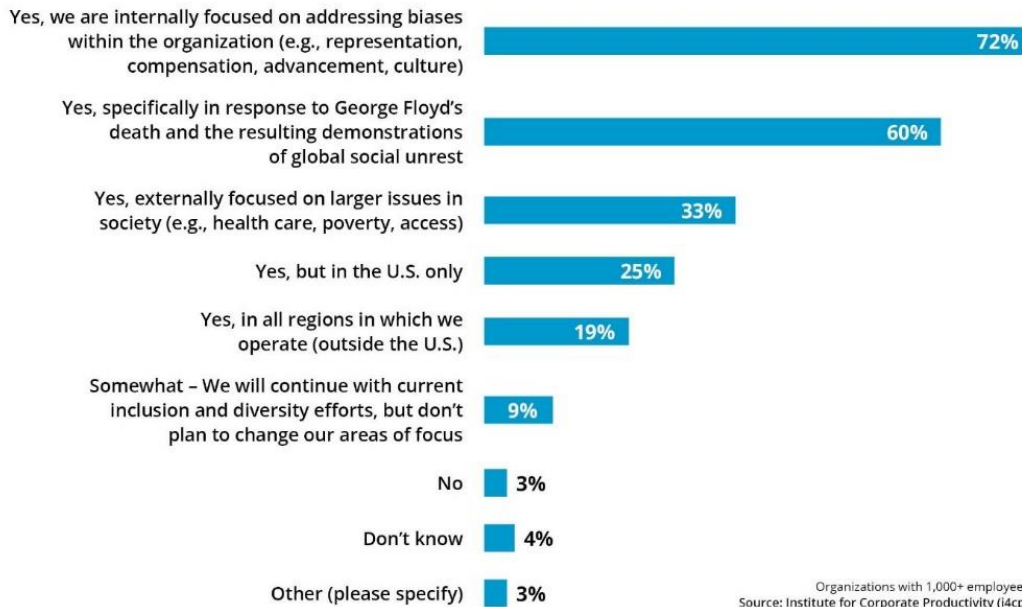
- These events are a catalyst to leapfrog forward. Several companies indicated that the compounded crises of Covid-19 and racial justice in this moment has caused them to advocate for increases in their Foundation distribution (for those that typically stay at 5%, increasing by a percentage), the creation of an employee relief fund, and/or offering a match that is greater than the company has ever offered before.

Racial Justice Responses

The Edelman Special Report: [Brands and Racial Justice in America](#) indicates that with racism in America, silence is not an option and brands must act to create systemic change. The groundswell of support for racial equity has made many companies become vocal and take bigger risks than they may have been willing to in the past. The biggest concern is whether this is a moment or a movement towards lasting change. One of the participants shared a quote by civil rights activist Joe Madison, “The difference between a moment and a movement is sacrifice.”

Many companies' responses to the murder of George Floyd and statements for reform to racism continue to evolve. The approach of Listen, Learn, and then Act has been adopted by some companies. Nearly 90% of organizations report expanding racial equity efforts. For more data, [view image below and i4cp summary](#).

In the wake of George Floyd's death, does your organization plan to respond specifically to address racial inequities and social injustice? (select all that apply)



Corporate statements and policy changes

- Employees want to see companies taking a stance on racial justice and communication from leadership.
- Many companies have expressed a long-term intent for action, not just an intermediate needs response.
- There is a demand for transparency from employees and other stakeholders on what the companies are doing to address racial inequity in their policies, services, supply chains, and philanthropic investments.
- Corporate leaders have issued anti-racism statements and some are looking at ways in which their policies and culture may be impeding the advancement and inclusion of black colleagues. This represents a big mind shift for leadership at some companies and the speed of recent action may be unprecedented.
- A useful resource for companies embarking on an internal review is Equity in the Center's [Awake to Woke to Work: Building a Race Equity Culture](#).

Elevating Employee Resource Groups (ERGs)

- Companies are taking the racial justice change message very seriously from the top down.
- Organizations are tapping black ERGs and elevating the expertise of these leaders for listening and learning. Some ERGs are providing advisory roles on the company's philanthropic investments.
- Many ERGs are advising not to fix what one may not understand. This takes a long journey of listening.
- Companies are also celebrating Pride month and are highlighting activities led by LGBTQ Employee Resource Groups and celebrating the recent Supreme Court ruling on LGBTQ rights.

Making space for challenging conversations

- Employees are asking to engage on racial justice, and companies are providing training on how to be effective allies and implicit bias to build the competency of talking about race and race equity.
- Starbucks is sharing an open source curriculum <http://tobewelcoming.com>
- Some are offering days of solidarity, in conjunction with other community partners in their cities.

- Many companies have held Town Halls to hear from black leaders across the organization and make space for candid, vulnerable conversations.
- Many companies adopted Juneteenth as a holiday or offered it as a day for reflection and learning.

Philanthropic investments for racial justice

- Several companies have made financial commitments (some multi-year) to fund racial justice organizations. These commitments are now working through governance and work streams.
- Donations are going to both large national organizations with longstanding relationships with companies as well as to grassroots organizations nominated by employees and Employee Resource groups.
- Companies are investing in systemic inequities such as digital equity, small business opportunity, etc.
- Companies have added social justice organizations to the lists of those available for corporate match and are revisiting United Way campaigns to include additional organizations aligned with racial equity.
- Corporate support of social justice organizations can be complicated due to lack of trust; relationships need to be built carefully to consider the best ways to engage.
- Points of Light has provided: [Next Steps in Anti-Racism Response: Where to Donate and Who to Support](#)

Internal alignment of efforts

- Companies are looking for other ways to link employee engagement with D&I internally and partnering with HR on early talent development efforts to better synch up efforts with talent recruitment practices.

Opportunity for Civic Engagement

- Many companies cited an increasing employee focus on civic engagement activities, such as voter registration, supporting the Census, advocacy, peaceful protests, connecting with non-partisan organizations, etc. Companies are considering tracking these activities separately from volunteerism and trying to navigate the line between political causes and social justice.
- Some companies are providing time off to attend social justice demonstrations.
- Companies are learning to trust their employees and relax some guidelines to provide employees with the freedom to support the movement on advancing racial equity. Companies are grappling with civic engagement activity and to what extent is it company-driven versus individual expression.

Coalitions and joint action

- In Minneapolis/ Twin Cities, there is a corporation coalition, led by General Mills, Target, 3M, and Best Buy. This collective effort will come together to advance racial equity.

COVID-19 Resources from each partnering organization:

- ACCP: [COVID-19 Resources for Corporate Citizenship Professionals](#)
- CECP: COVID-19 Resources [Recap for CEOs](#) and [Recap for CR Leaders](#)
- COF: [COVID-19 Resource Hub](#)
- POL: [COVID-19 Action Plan](#)