



COUNCIL *on* FOUNDATIONS

Case Study:

Box Tops for Education

General Mills

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Organizational Profile: Foundation and Corporate Giving Program

How this program connects to the five-point leadership agenda of *Increasing Impact, Enhancing Value:*

2. Develop and inclusive “operating system” for philanthropic investment.

The Box Tops for Education (BTFE) program offers parents and kids easy, everyday ways to earn cash for their school when they purchase one of more than 240 participating brands. It is already a proven (and award-winning) model of strategic philanthropy. However, as more brands join, more schools engage, and more money is earned, BTFE has the potential to “tip” into the realm of catalytic philanthropy.

The program began in 1996 in California as an alternative to cents-off product couponing. It invited parents concerned about education to purchase General Mills products that carried special proofs of purchase (box tops) redeemable as cash for their child’s school.

Over the past 15 years, BTFE has expanded to more than 90,000 participating schools across the United States and is now carried on products beyond those of General Mills, including Kleenex, Ziploc, Hefty, Juicy Juice, Avery, Land O’ Lakes, Brita, Hanes, and Boise. Since the program’s inception, America’s schools have earned more than \$445 million through BTFE, using their earnings to purchase items such as computers and computer software, library books, art supplies, and playground equipment.

What problem or issue were you trying to overcome? What was the ultimate objective?

Description of challenge to be solved:

Commercial Challenge: Incenting consumer purchases more efficiently (and sustainably) than cents-off coupons and other traditional promotion incentives.

Community Challenge: Helping schools make financial ends meet.

Objectives to be achieved by this practice:

Commercial Objective: Greater consumer loyalty.

Community Objective: Increased family engagement and financial support to schools.

What strategies, tools, and resources were used to address this issue and achieve the goals?

Each year, enrolled schools receive a program kit to help them build their own BTFE fundraising campaign. Most schools designate a program coordinator to develop ways to encourage students, parents, school staff, and community members to clip box tops from participating products and bring them to school.

After the collected box tops are sent to General Mills, the school receives a check, equivalent to 10 cents for every box top redeemed. Schools can earn up to \$60,000 per year, up to \$20,000 respectively from the Clip, Marketplace, and Reading Room program components to spend on anything they choose. BTFE has grown over the past 15 years, broadening its reach, impact, and innovation.

The Early Years (1996–2000): After being introduced exclusively on selected Big G cereals in California, the program expands to all Big G and General Mills Snack brands and eventually all major General Mills categories.

Middle Years (2000–2005): With General Mills’s acquisition of the Pillsbury Company, BTFE doubles in size, expands into frozen and refrigerated categories, and begins to be supported by major U.S. grocers and mass merchants.

Recent Years (2005–To date): General Mills invites collaborative, noncompeting partners to license the BTFE program on its packages. It has become the premier back-to-school merchandising platform for such major U.S. retailers as Wal-Mart, Kroger, Publix, and Safeway.

What were the outcomes for the business and society, and how were they measured?

Our own research and independent marketing studies found the following:

BTFE remains on-trend:

- Providing children a quality education is a top concern of moms

- Funding of K-8 schools continues to be challenged

BTFE delivers its impact with industry-leading scale:

- 90 percent of households with kid awareness of BTFE
- 67 percent of households with kid participation in BTFE
- 70 percent of America's K-8 schools actively participate, and BTFE expanded to more than 5,400 additional schools last year, totaling 76,499 participating schools

BTFE drives base volume and penetration every day.

BTFE drives switching and is an effective tiebreaker at shelf.

BTFE creates loyalty and advocacy through 70,000 coordinators and through regular consumers.

BTFE gives sales the tools and theme they need to drive the highest volume power events:

- The BTFE back-to-school event last September was the largest event in General Mills history at several key accounts, including Walmart.

BTFE nourishes the lives of millions of kids every year:

- At an assumption of 300 kids per school, BTFE helped make a difference for more than 20 million kids last year.

In 2011, BTFE donated more than \$67 million to U.S. schools.

What advice would you give a grantmaker faced with a similar opportunity?

- **Simplicity:** Combining a universal insight (I want to be involved in my child's education but don't have a lot of time...) with extraordinary ease (I already need to buy breakfast cereal...).
- **Scale:** More products = more families; more families = more schools; more schools = more earnings; more earnings = more change.
- **Sales:** The more grocery categories involved, the greater the "skin in the game" from retailers interested in supporting the program (and their community's schools and shoppers).