



Brands for A Better Society: Guide To Implementing and Managing Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Programs

Recent years have ushered in a new era for many brands, as stakeholders—including customers, employees, investors, board members, vendors and more—are no longer satisfied with simply supporting a corporation's bottom line; they are demanding more and are prepared to shift loyalty accordingly. They want to support and work for brands which adopt a broader social responsibility and have a moral compass that demonstrate care about the world they live in and focus on causes that are important to them.

Perhaps in part because of this expectation, more and more companies have expressly adopted programs or initiatives to reflect their commitment to specific social principles. These programs or initiatives are often referred to simply as CSR (corporate social responsibility) programs. CSR programs support a plethora of causes, including sustainability, human rights, education, the environment, diversity, equity and inclusion and more, and come in all shapes and sizes: some are geared toward donations of time, money or resources, while others are focused on aligning company operations with the goals.

Hand in hand with increased CSR has also been an uptick in ESG—or environmental, social and governance—reporting. Some countries have even enacted mandatory ESG reporting requirements. Both CSR and ESG programs can be used to assess how socially conscious or responsible a company is, and the nature of that effort, but they are not one and the same. Whereas CSR programs often are geared to internally implement a company's commitment to a social principle, ESG is a set of standards and measurable goals regarding the environmental impact, social standing, and governance of a company that can be used by investors to assess a company's long-term sustainability performance. While both can be critically important, this guide is focused on CSR programs and not ESG reporting.

INTA conducted a study of members in 2019 about existing CSR programs. The results highlighted the need for brands to have more focused direction in their CSR action plans. In particular, the INTA study found that:

- While CSR policies and/or activities are found among INTA members through all geographic regions, many brands have yet to implement policies and otherwise engage in CSR activities.
- INTA members largely view CSR as a social obligation that benefits brands economically and otherwise, but not all brands fully understand and/or have taken advantage of these benefits.

How can brands adopt and make the most of their CSR initiatives and programs? How can they really make a difference in society today? The below chart, prepared by INTA's Brands for Better Society Committee, is designed as a guide to provide tips and best practices, organized so as to be accessible to brands that are just starting CSR programs, brands that want to evaluate CSR programs they have already adopted, and brands that are ready to prioritize their CSR as part of their business model. **The guide also focuses on a critical element for INTA members: what is the role of an IP professional in this process and what can we do to support these important efforts?**

Step 1: Conduct An Assessment

What is your brand's purpose and what are you trying to achieve/accomplish? What legacy do you want your brand to have/leave?

Beginner: How to Get Started with Your Own CSR Program

- ▶ What CSR activities, if any, are those in which the company is already participating?
- ▶ What CSR goals matter to stakeholders, including consumers, investors and employees?
- ▶ What do company employees suggest are activities or topics they find meaningful? (Studies have shown that employees who find purpose at work are happier, work harder and stay longer.)
- ▶ What are areas in which the company could do better (e.g., environmental, energy, human factors)?
- ▶ What logistical capabilities and expertise does the business have to support a specific, and differentiated, CSR goal?
- ▶ What resources can the company make available to support this goal (e.g., financial, workforce, etc.)?

Intermediate: How to Bring Your CSR Program to the Next Level

- ▶ What are the strengths and weaknesses of current CSR initiatives?
- ▶ Any changes in goals that matter to consumers?
- ▶ What other initiatives would stakeholders like to see the company take?
- ▶ Other areas in which the company could do better (e.g., specific CSR-related issues that the company needs to address)?
- ▶ Alignment with company mission statement, business plans and brand guidelines
- ▶ Current management and employee participation—any changes needed?

Advanced: How to Derive the Maximum Benefit from a Full CSR Program

- ▶ Have you used follow-up surveys, evaluations, and formal audits to ensure the CSR program is meeting company and stakeholder needs?
- ▶ Consider consulting with specialists for best strategy and effective execution
- ▶ Examine outreach—what impact is the CSR program having on stakeholders and the public?

The Role of an IP Professional in the Assessment Phase

[Step 1]

- ▶ Collaborate with internal stakeholders to define the firm's values and culture and how values and culture add brand value. IP professionals, as the guardians of trademarks, can bring unique and important perspectives to this conversation.
- ▶ Evaluate the firm's mission statement, principles and/or code of conduct to best encapsulate the firm's values and culture and decide what role CSR will have. To the extent these policies do not exist, help formulate them.
- ▶ Educate company leadership and marketing teams as to the value of CSR programs in enhancing the strength of the company brand/IP and caution as to the importance of proper implementation and messaging.
- ▶ Discuss the differences between CSR and ESG and help company ensure its CSR approach will complement and not conflict with ESG goals and messaging.

Step 2: Action Plan

Develop and execute an action plan based on challenges in your community, company’s values, company’s core competencies, and how your company may make the greatest impact.

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<p>Based on results of the audit, pick a goal or purpose to further:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▶ Start small, as the program develops, the company can expand the program. Pick 1 area and work to create impact. Often times those small achievements will propel organizations to do more.▶ Define what kind of CSR program the company is going to start. What will be the focus? E.g., internal operations; charity; etc.?▶ Remember—this can be done by identifying and partnering with other organizations that have already done the work (e.g., particular charities). While creating a program from scratch is an option, it is not the only option.▶ Transparency is key when creating an Action Plan. Once you identify your areas of strengths and weaknesses, it’s important to be open about both and put short-term and long-term goals towards the wins and the long-term improvements. Regardless of what is done, it will be criticized so it’s important to remain humble in this process.▶ Determine number of resources necessary▶ If resources are limited, there are ways to provide employees with opportunities without expending money, for instance, opportunities to volunteer time, such as at an on-site volunteer event. This work can then be promoted to other stakeholders <p>Put the plan into effect:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▶ Identify a management team/ leader to manage and promote the CSR initiative(s).▶ Determine if there are any departments where the CSR initiative will be particularly relevant or impactful.▶ Identify employees who will be assigned/ willing to volunteer to participate and determine what you need.▶ Decide whether the program will be open to all employees or only a specific team/team member(s).▶ Draft steps to follow (rules of the road, what is the plan to be accomplished?)▶ Brainstorm plan to monitor results▶ Commence work!	<p>Based on results of the audit, build out goals and purposes to expand, redefine as necessary and put new plan into effect.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▶ Top management needs to sign off on these goals and action plan. Consider having an annual update at a board meeting from the newly formed committee. Holding the program accountable to its goals is very important.▶ Expansion may relate to adding initiatives or adding resources. It may also involve a change in focus, enlargement of existing programs or addition of entirely new initiatives.▶ Revisit initial plan and revise to accomplish new goals▶ Draft modified mission statement▶ Draft modified management plan – who will run the new program?<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Consider developing an official CSR committee to lead with planning, recruiting and execution.• Determine participants for new plan— are more bodies needed?▶ Determine what additional resources exist and are needed; look at whether resources are being wasted.▶ Consider new ways to provide more resources, whether through additional funding or programs:<ul style="list-style-type: none">• If CSR program is impactful, is there a case to dedicate more financial resources?• Are there more employee incentives to put together the program, such as providing employees with paid time off to volunteer (1–2 days per year) or in-house service hours.• There are many working groups by Industry to address sustainability and CSR. As with IP enforcement work, your company/brand can benefit from working together to achieve greater impact with collective initiatives. If a group does not exist, you can create one rallying around one or more goals or targets, or work with your city to find the right resources that can impact your local community.	<p>Based on results of the audit, ensure program is built out to further goals and purposes and has become a core mission of business.</p> <p>If not yet done, formalize CSR program and definition and then put plan into effect.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▶ Determine whether the initiatives should be expanded and in which way?▶ If expansion is on the horizon, draft plan for all initiatives to connect in some way (e.g., through leadership, promotion, etc.).▶ What additional resources can/ should be allocated and where will they come from?▶ If it does not already exist, create management-level/ executive positions specifically responsible for managing CSR initiatives▶ Consider enhanced goals such as acquiring specialized certifications (B Corp status, etc.)▶ Target goals and issue prioritization, identify and address the specific ways the company plans to improve CSR.▶ Consider whether a public letter from your CEO (or other executive) would give weight to the commitment in the public’s eye. Summarize the company’s unique history, citizenship and reiterate the long-term goals etc. <p>Consider additional employee participation perks/ opportunities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▶ Create networks/awards for employees▶ Matching programs for donations▶ Volunteer days off▶ The opportunities are endless depending on what fits into your specific program.

Role of the IP Professional with the Action Plan [Step 2]

- ▶ Offer ideas on how particular CSR programs might impact company’s IP and brand value—while an IP professional is not necessarily a CSR expert, IP professionals are experts in brand value and goodwill. Brainstorm how brand value and goodwill might be impacted by certain CSR programs.
- ▶ Consider, search and clear new trademarks that will complement internal and external and CSR programs.
- ▶ If working with partners, assess whether licenses are needed to use partner brands or for partner brands to use company IP and develop guidelines for such use.

Step 3: Promote & Measure

Measure impact and report results. Collect data/information throughout the program, check in periodically to assess the program, and adjust as needed to sustain the program and its impact. Do not just collect impact data, but also benchmark your program against other internal or external CSR programs.

Beginner: How to Get Started with Your Own CSR Program

Have a specific department/person in charge of a communications plan to share CSR activities on internal or external webpages, internal communications, and social media.

Consider spotlighting internal employees who went above and beyond with CSR efforts to boost morale.

Department responsible for initiative should plan **quarterly assessments** to determine what benefits, if any, the business is receiving. Questions to consider include:

- ▶ Are participants engaged?
- ▶ Has the program been communicated effectively to stakeholders? Has any feedback been received?
- ▶ Have resources been allocated properly? Are there enough resources? Are resources going underutilized?

In addition to surveys, consider soliciting feedback from participants immediately following a CSR event. This allows you gauge the efficiency of the event/training and allows tracking mechanism to meet future goals. Most organizations track for “impact” or “engagement, which is easier to gauge after specific activities.

As an aid, consider quarterly surveys of participants and stakeholders to gauge effectiveness of initiative:

- ▶ Are stakeholders aware of the initiative and finding the initiative to be meaningful? Why or why not?
- ▶ What feedback has been received?

What suggestions do stakeholders have for going forward?

Intermediate: How to Bring Your CSR Program to the Next Level

- ▶ Establish a set calendar for **evaluating progress and success**—monthly, quarterly, annually. Group should assess, among other things, all the questions set out above (and to the left).

- ▶ Consider formal report to present results
- ▶ Consider formal surveys to better evaluate impact

- ▶ Continue to monitor communications and message through webpages, social media, and other communications.

- ▶ It is important not be afraid to also state publicly goals you’re working to meet. Transparency is essential in giving your CSR program authenticity.

- ▶ Stakeholder feedback continues to be crucially important to determine whether the program is as impactful as it could be.

Advanced: How to Derive the Maximum Benefit from a Full CSR Program

- ▶ Continue with monitoring, evaluation and **communications** as set out above.
- ▶ Find ways to connect with other organizations for benchmarking, including through conferences and events
- ▶ Consider including CSR contribution as a relevant metric when assessing and remunerating staff performance
- ▶ Consider formal campaigns to promote CSR program and activities.
- ▶ Consider formal report of CSR results.
- ▶ CSR checklists are great internal tools to focus everyone on CSR objectives when making business decisions. It is also a good first step in establishing the CSR report.

The Role of an IP Professional [Step 3]

- ▶ Discuss and consider how the program will be communicated to the public and put in place messaging guidelines and also review controls for legal compliance and brand consistency. Ensure all marketing is consistent with current IP protections and focuses.
- ▶ Monitor how IP is used and assess changes to brand value/goodwill and bring any changes/impact to the attention of leadership.
- ▶ Monitor trademark usage by brand and partners.