

A New Philanthropy Model

An Interview with
Suzanne DiBianca, President, Salesforce.com Foundation

EDITORS' NOTE Suzanne DiBianca is also the co-Founder of the Salesforce.com Foundation. Prior to her role at salesforce.com, she was a principal at CSC Consulting Group in the Strategic Services Division, and the program and marketing director for Partners for Democratic Change. She previously served on the board of San Francisco School Volunteers, and currently sits on a number of boards and advisory councils in the community including the World Affairs Council's Global Philanthropy Forum and the Entrepreneurs Foundation. She is a graduate of the University of Colorado at Boulder with a B.A. in communications and economics.



Suzanne DiBianca

ORGANIZATION BRIEF Since its founding, the Salesforce.com Foundation (salesforcefoundation.org) has pioneered an integrated philanthropy model, a model that weaves salesforce.com's philanthropic efforts into the very core of its success – its people, products, and profits – to help advance and improve communities around the world. In March 2009, the foundation began an innovative new stage in its evolution when it became a reseller of salesforce.com products. Beyond the initial product donation to nonprofit and educational institutions, the foundation now also provides deep discounts on additional salesforce.com products, with 100 percent of the revenue from those additional sales returning to the nonprofit sector. With this change, the Salesforce.com Foundation has become an organization with a sustainable business model, driven by a social change mission, with community engagement for social good at its core.

Salesforce.com has made philanthropy a core part of its business model. Why has that been so critical?

We had a new vision for corporate philanthropy. We saw that companies were waiting until they were too big to start philanthropy programs. It's pretty difficult to bake something into the culture of the company once it's a certain size.

At the time, we were creating a three-legged platform for a new business model based in the cloud, which was unheard of then. First was the new technology model; second, the new business model was subscription-based, pay as you go; and the third leg was the new philanthropy model, which we aimed to bake in right from the early part of our company's founding.

One of the things that you can do as a young, small company that you can't do as a bigger company is leverage your pre-IPO equity. We put a percentage of our pre-IPO stock into the foundation so when the company went public, the foundation really benefitted from that.

The other thing we could do as a small company was to promote volunteerism with our employees early on. As we grew, so did our number of volunteer activities.

We donated our sales force automation product to help nonprofits manage their business data.

Has that model remained consistent or has it evolved?

It has done both, but it has mainly scaled. We have built really important structural elements on the volunteer side that have made it become part of our company's business process. For example, on day one of new hire orientation employees are sent out to do a volunteer project in a community.

The product aspect became incredibly relevant when we opened the code and the platform, which allowed for easy customization. Nonprofits took to that quickly – especially the innovators – and they used our platform to manage programs and case work. The ASPCA tracks dog distribution via Salesforce, for instance.

The final thing is the equity. The pre-IPO stock basically turned into grant money.

How close do the areas that you support need to align with the business?

Volunteerism for us has never been directly correlated with company strategy. It's true we do things with kids, and especially girls, in education and technology. But that is because it's driven by our female engineers who have a real passion in this area. We don't dictate where our employees get involved, though we do provide them with options should they need guidance. We encourage employees to volunteer with the causes they are most passionate about.

When it comes to volunteerism in our employee grant category, our targets are very diverse. What we're trying to do is create an army of change agents. This is also true with our product donation: we have more than 22,000 nonprofits using salesforce.com, from Teach for America to the American Red Cross to the ASPCA.

As it relates to grant-making, we have refined this over the years. We focus on technology innovation, particularly mobile, which is very aligned to our business strategy.

We're also looking at how our business strategy can improve the communities we serve. We have funded apps for NGOs like the Grameen Foundation to really take their work into the field on a mobile phone.

We also focus on education and jobs, which are aligned with the business strategy. Education is an obvious focus because we have a huge gap in STEM performance in our country, and we need to correct that to ensure we have the talent we need for the future. On the job front, we have partnered with Year Up, which helps support young urban adults in gaining the skills they need to succeed, and we have just funded them with a \$2.5 million grant to scale in San Francisco.

What metrics do you follow to track the impact of this work?

The best thing about using Salesforce is that we can measure all of our activities on the platform. I have a dashboard of all of our volunteerism, which I use to track where everything stands in real-time.

The same is true of product donation. I can look at customer success metrics such as customer usage rates. This year, we had a goal in our business plan to increase our customer usage rates 10 percentage points, so we focused on training and user groups.

As it relates to grants, our partners, like Year Up, measure everything they do on Salesforce – we can see where these young adults are working in continuing education and how many have been placed in jobs.

Is the focus on STEM increasing adequately?

Part of the reason not enough is being done is infrastructure. You can't deliver STEM unless you have WiFi connectivity in schools.

I recently looked at the San Francisco Unified technology infrastructure plan and close to \$200 million is needed to bring the schools into the 21st century. We have learned that you have to work on multiple levels to try to address this.

How do you manage the work geographically and how engaged do you get in each of the areas?

Most corporate foundations have a few people in the foundation who give a lot of money. We have a lot of people in the foundation who give a somewhat lesser amount of money.

We believe you need feet on the street to make a difference, and your people and technology will go much further in the long run than cash will. ●