

Supporting Communities

An Interview with Elizabeth Roscoe,
Executive Director, Western Union Foundation

EDITORS' NOTE Elizabeth Roscoe assumed her current post in 2016. Roscoe joined Western Union in 2013 and most recently served as the head of Global Product Marketing, Brand and Communications for Western Union Business Solutions. Prior to joining Western Union, she held a range of marketing roles at American Express, PepsiCo, Sainsbury's, Campbell's Soup Company, and Nestle. Roscoe has a B.A. and Master's degree from The University of Manchester and studied at RSM Erasmus Universiteit / Rotterdam School of Management. Roscoe recently completed the High Potentials Leadership Program through Harvard Business School Executive Education.



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FOUNDATION BRIEF The Western Union Foundation (foundation.westernunion.com) is dedicated to creating a better world, where the ability to realize dreams through economic opportunity is not just a privilege for the few but a right for all. Through its signature program, Education for Better, the Western Union Foundation works to realize this vision by supporting education and disaster relief efforts as pathways toward a better future. Their combined social ventures efforts make life better for individuals, families, and communities around the world. Since its inception in 2001, The Western Union Foundation has paid more than US\$111 million in grants and other giving. These funds have been pledged to more than 2,794 nongovernmental organizations in more than 138 countries and territories.

Would you discuss the history and heritage of the Western Union Foundation and how you define its mission?

The Western Union Foundation reflects the values of the Western Union Company and its mission, "Moving Money for Better." The idea being that when money moves across borders, better things happen. A father paying for his child's education is one of the things we talk about, as well as an NGO receiving money where it's needed most around the globe.

We at the foundation focus on three pillars: education is one, because we believe it is one of the surest pathways to economic opportunity, so we have been working on education programs since our inception.

Second is our disaster relief and humanitarian efforts, where we try to expand our education cause to focus on women, youth, and refugees, and how we can offer short-term help in crises through education, which leads to long-term systemic change that gives people economic opportunity.

Third is supporting our employee base. The company has thousands of employees that operate in more than 200 countries and territories around the world. Because of the history and

culture of Western Union and our mission to move money for better, employees are incredibly engaged in humanitarian projects. The foundation supports those causes and tries to help employees find volunteer opportunities to get involved in their local communities.

Does the Western Union Foundation align giving with business strategy?

While the business and foundation are separate entities, they try to work together so that efforts are augmented. The Western Union Foundation does align with the business. We don't need to, but we choose to. We believe in supporting those communities that Western Union serves. For example, we look to the company to see how we can leverage its technology, products and services.

On the education side, do you have a flagship program where you focus your efforts or do you touch on various aspects?

Education is our core mission because about a third of Western Union transactions are sent to support education. It's a natural fit with the passions of the company's employees and customers.

We have a flagship program called Education for Better. The current mission of that program is to help 50,000 women and young people gain vital 21st century job skills by 2020.

To do that, we just launched WU Scholars, a global scholarship program for students pursuing a post-secondary education.

We also work with regional partners, a small number of NGOs, one in each of the regions where Western Union operates.

One example is the Forest Whitaker Peace and Development Initiative. This collaboration includes a three-year grant to support peace-building and education at a refugee camp in Kiryandongo, Uganda. This

funding will help provide access to life-skills and conflict-resolution education for 10,000 refugees at the camp.

How critical is it to build metrics that track impact in those areas?

We're trying to be sophisticated in how we measure impact. When we started the foundation, impact was largely tracked by hours volunteered and financial contributions; that is still important today, but it's not core.

When we start to work with our partners, we really want to understand the proposal and the depth of its impact. We team up with our grantees to think through the process from the start, so we know how our grant is being used, who it is helping, and how we can work with them to measure impact.

It's difficult, but it's a great learning process.

How critical to the success of the foundation is having engagement and commitment from the leadership and management team at Western Union?

It's incredibly important and the key to our success. The engagement is led organically from the bottom up from employees who are passionate and care and want to support with volunteering local NGOs, but it also comes from our leadership team.

Every year, we run a global giving campaign where we invite our employee base to get involved with the foundation. Western Union's CEO is personally committed to the work of the foundation and is an example for employees, which helps them understand why it's important to our company culture to be involved.

Last year, we had over 81 percent of the global workforce contributing financially to the foundation. The average company-giving participation is around 30 percent, so we feel very lucky to have such incredible engagement from our leaders. We share the work we do and advocate for the change we're trying to make.

With such a strong purpose at Western Union's core, are the people who come to work here already interested in doing this type of work?

I can't say for sure that's why employees come to Western Union, but I believe the strong purpose and impact is why they stay. Culture is incredibly important because it gives us the opportunity to link the foundation with the business, which helps inspire our employees in our global workforce. ●