

Survey says Austin businesses give more than ever



Business philanthropy continues to grow in Austin, with more local companies giving to nonprofits and increasing their philanthropic budgets, according to an annual survey by Rodman and Associates, a local philanthropic advisor.

More than 250 Austin-area businesses participated in the survey, responding to questions about their 2016 giving. The survey reported that of those 250 businesses, 96 participated in some kind of community giving and 71 percent had philanthropy budgets, which most likely funded education, human services and health and

wellness causes. Of those that had philanthropy budgets, 59 percent reported their budget had increased from the previous year.

"This is a moment whose time has come," said Debbie Johnson, principal of Austin-based consultants Successful Giving and co-author of "Give for Good: A How-To Guide for Business Giving."

"There are a lot more companies in Austin and around the country that are not only giving back, but giving back much more visibly."

Volunteering was also a major part of business philanthropy with 67 percent of the companies surveyed reporting that they engaged their employees in group volunteering and 59 percent saying that offered paid leave for individual volunteering.

Johnson said research consistently demonstrates that people will choose a brand that engages in some kind of community giving over one that does not, but those companies that give back just for good publicity tend to be fewer and less successful. **"There's a tendency for us to be cynical, but I've seen philanthropy even at very large corporations that genuinely did it because they wanted to support the community."**

In fact, the Rodman survey respondents reported that supporting the community was the top reason for giving back, followed by building their corporate image, attracting and retaining employees and enhancing employee skills.

Austin-based Amy's Ice Cream made community giving part of its business years ago, said Steve Simmons, business development director. **"Instead of having an advertising budget, we decided to give gift certificates to every nonprofit that asks for it. It was a way for us to be involved in every school, every band."**

Simmons said employees participate in Amy's philanthropy at every level, including organizing and teaming up for volunteer projects. "It's easy to get them on board," he said. "They get it. Each one of our stores gets involved."

Greg Pierce started the online office supply retailer ZumaOffice.com in response to years of working amid "loose ethics" in large corporations, he said. From the start, ZumaOffice.com has donated 50 percent of its profits to charity.

"We just took a leap of faith and it's been good for us," said Pierce. "I honestly don't miss that 50 percent. I was a vice president of a Fortune 100 company and it didn't mean enough there at the end. This has given meaning to our work, for me and for the employees. And our customers really appreciate it."

Giving City Austin

This article is published through a partnership with Giving City Austin, which reports on the area's nonprofit community. Read more Giving City stories at GivingCityAustin.com.