

Recognize the rationale for implementing a social responsibility plan and the social goals your organization wants to promote. Society now expects more community involvement from organizations—research can help identify the needs of that community.

Identify causes that are consistent with the organization's mission, values, goals, and strategies. The entire organization is more likely to support a social responsibility plan for a consistent cause. Support from senior management is especially important, since they control resources and have the most influence.

Determine organizational objectives for a social responsibility plan. Objectives should be SMART: specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and time-bound (like marketing and advertising objectives).

Specify the type and amount of resources needed to achieve set social responsibility objectives. For example, if your company wants to implement a volunteerism plan, support employees by offering time off for volunteering.

Evaluate how social responsibility efforts perform relative to their objectives. You should also decide whether to change your efforts and assess the appropriateness of future involvement.

Social Responsibility and Health and Wellness

According to *Canada's Physical Activity Guide to Healthy Active Living* (Health Canada, 1998), physical activity reduces the risk of premature death, coronary heart disease, obesity, high blood pressure, adult-onset diabetes, osteoporosis, stroke, depression, and cancer. Other benefits of physical activity include better health, improved fitness, better posture and balance, weight control, stronger muscles and bones, and relaxation and reduced stress. Yet, despite these benefits, 64% of Canadians are still not active enough to benefit their health through physical activity (Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute, 2001).

Health and wellness centres can educate the public about fitness and promote a more active culture (and at the same time improve their own bottom line).

Some health club representatives speak at workplaces and in schools to promote proper nutrition and the benefits of regular physical activity (while also educating the audience about their own clubs). Health clubs can also hold group classes at local community recreation halls. To induce parents to work out regularly, health and wellness centres like the YMCA offer high-quality child care for parents and after-school programs that incorporate values of caring, honesty, respect, and responsibility.

Socioeconomic disparity marginalizes many of our fellow citizens, limiting their access to essential goods and depriving them of any meaningful role in social life (Lessard, 1997). In response, the YMCA offers membership assistance and outreach programs to people in need, giving them an opportunity to benefit from physical activity, regardless of income level. The YMCA also provides many social programs through its Enterprise Centre, offering an alternative education program, employment services, and an entrepreneurial program, as well as its Family Ties program that helps families get off social assistance.

Health and wellness organizations' corporate policies can encourage employees to volunteer. CIBC (and its 7,000 employees) helped to raise more than \$10 million for breast cancer research, education, diagnosis, and treatment (CIBC, 2001). Employees could also mentor youth, increasing young people's enthusiasm about physical activity.

Summing Up

A properly implemented social responsibility initiative can lead to many benefits for both the organization and community. Health and wellness centres are uniquely positioned to positively affect the well-being and health of their communities, while also improving their own bottom lines. Volunteering, donations, and sponsorship are some of the ways that health and wellness centres can positively affect their communities.

Social responsibility no longer involves only the company, as Friedman suggested in 1970. Rather, social responsibility is mutual—organizations affect society and society's well-being can influence organizations' success.

References available on request or from the Alberta Centre for Active Living web site at www.centre4activeliving.ca.

Ideas for Action in the Community

- **Establish safe, well lighted walking, jogging, and bicycle paths.**
- **Provide areas to secure bicycles near workplaces, shopping areas, and other public or private buildings.**
- **Convert downtown centres into pedestrian malls. Arrange for shopping malls or school gymnasiums to open early for walkers.**
- **Secure access to and adequate lighting for outdoor playing fields, university or school track fields, parks, tennis courts, and other community resource areas to allow evening use by community residents.**
- **Make public stairwells accessible, ventilated, well lighted, safe, and clean.**
- **Establish police precincts at inner-city community recreation facilities, and security escort services from program locations to parking lots or garages.**
- **Develop parks or playgrounds in vacant lots or accessible rooftops, or convert surplus public lands into park and recreation facilities.**
- **Establish playgrounds for children and adults. Develop walking paths around children's playgrounds to foster activity among the adults who accompany the children.**
- **Provide transportation, child-care services, or other services that overcome barriers to participation. Advocate for inclusion of major community exercise or athletic facilities on public transportation routes.**
- **Map out neighbourhood walking paths and install distance markers to help people judge distances.**
- **Combine physical activity and environmental projects, such as cleaning up beaches, along park trails, or along roads.**
- **Build fitness and walking paths that are convenient to all community residents.**

Adapted and reprinted from the US Department of Health and Human Services (1999).

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