XTEAM® & SKILLS FOR CITIES BOSTON

A City-Wide Day of Skills-Based Volunteering for the SDGs

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

At Berkshire Bank, its people are its most powerful asset. Through its XTEAM employee volunteer program, Berkshire Bank provides employees with the framework and company resources, including paid volunteer time off, to improve their community. As a member of IMPACT2030, the company is committed to harnessing the expertise and skills of their human capital to support the SDGs. While most of Berkshire Bank's volunteer projects contributed to the SDGs in some capacity, the company wanted to amplify its impact; heighten awareness of the SDGs; and address fundamental challenges in its local communities by bringing together businesses and non-profit organizations. In 2018, Berkshire Bank initiated a coalition to develop the first-ever City-Wide Day of Skills-Based Volunteering for the SDGs in Boston. A tremendous success, the initiative has continued into 2019 and, potentially, will expand its geographic reach in 2020.

THE CHALLENGE

Throughout greater Boston, there was a general lack of awareness on the SDGs and how they could impact local communities. In addition, businesses that were already aligning their activities with the SDGs were looking for ways to ignite action with their employees and inspire collaboration around critical issues across the city. At the same time, more small and medium-sized businesses were expressing interest in Skills-Based Volunteerism but needed guidance on how to get started and lacked the resources to launch their own initiatives.

“If we expect to achieve any one of the SDGs, businesses of all sizes must come together. That includes Small to Medium Sized Enterprises that make up 99% of all businesses in the US and employ more than 50% of the human capital. That untapped force for good is one of the main reasons we launched Skills for Cities Boston offering a scalable model for partnership that brings together stakeholders of all sectors and sizes to address the global goals at a local level.”

- GARY LEVANTE, SVP, Corporate Responsibility & Culture, Berkshire Bank
OUR SOLUTION

Out of these challenges, a cross-sector collaboration engaging non-profits and businesses of all sizes was born. Launched in 2018, Skills For Cities Boston brought together more than 150 employees from businesses of all sizes to tackle 16 non-profit service projects, each supporting an SDG, in a city-wide day of Skills-Based Volunteerism. The Goals of Skills For Cities Boston were to:

- Demystify Skills-Based Volunteering and the SDGs—of particular importance for those small and medium-sized businesses, where the investment in Skills-Based Volunteering and lack of knowledge of the SDGs can be a hurdle to engagement.
- Develop a cross-company, city-wide model for skilled service in support of the SDGs that can be replicated in other cities.
- Galvanize ongoing collaboration across Boston between businesses and non-profits in support of the SDGs.

THE RESULTS

Launching and executing Skills for Cities Boston was about harnessing the power and skills of the entire business sector to support the work of non-profit organizations—and creating a scalable, replicable model that galvanized ongoing engagement in communities. The goal for Berkshire Bank was that businesses who participated would see this event as an opportunity to foster ongoing collaboration through skills-based volunteerism to help achieve the SDGs in Boston, and beyond. The results speak for themselves:

- Nonprofits who participated in Skills for Cities Boston, reported $80,000 in social returns on investment.
- The most frequent skills cited as developed by volunteers were: Collaboration/Teamwork (78%), Problem Solving/Navigating Ambiguity (76%), and Creative Thinking/Innovation (68%).
- 65% of volunteers, and 47% of non-profit staff reported that they gained new familiarity about the role that they play in advancing Sustainable Development Goals.

PARTNERSHIPS IN PRACTICE

Skills For Cities Boston would not have happened without the support of three critical organizations: Common Impact, SVP Boston and IMPACT2030. In addition to these core partners, Berkshire Bank and Berkshire’s VP of Corporate Social Responsibility, who also serves as the Regional Voice Lead for IMPACT2030 in New England, played a major role in bringing together the broader business community along with these critical organizations. The first businesses to get involved after Berkshire Bank included Cigna, State Street, BNY Mellon, Fidelity, PwC and the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston.

Since the Skills for Cities Boston initiative was the first of its kind, there was no existing template or outcome data available to use as a reference point. In order to bring the concept from vision to reality, Berkshire Bank needed to build and develop our own model from the ground up. This is where the strength of its partnerships with key stakeholders became its most important asset, as each organization contributed their own guidance and expertise to the process.

CALL TO ACTION

When it comes to replicating an initiative like Skills For Cities Boston, it may seem natural to rely on the largest enterprises who have the clear resources and funding to affect change. However, every company - regardless of size - has the ability to contribute in their own unique way. Organizations must reach outside their own networks to identify other organizations that have the core competencies and local knowledge that make events like Skills For Cities Boston possible.