



United Way  
of Central Carolinas

# CORPORATE VOLUNTEERISM

APRIL 9, 2022



## CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY



UNITED WAY OF CENTRAL CAROLINAS

# THE EVOLUTION OF VOLUNTEERING THROUGH THE PANDEMIC

**On a Saturday** in January 2020, United Way of Central Carolinas hosted its annual MLK Call to Service, engaging 1,000 volunteers who answered the call to give back to the greater Charlotte community while celebrating the life, legacy and vision of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. ¶ The event was held in partnership with The Park Church at The Park Expo & Conference Center in Charlotte. It featured a variety of hands-on service-learning projects and educational activities for children, individuals, families and groups.

Volunteers, including employees from companies like Duke Energy and Atrium Health, sat together at tables in the conference center to complete projects such as creating number and alphabet flash cards for Classroom Central, writing encouragement cards for Love In Action Project, assembling no-sew baby blankets for Baby Bundles and designing bookmarks for Promising Pages.

Overall, it was an impactful day. Nonprofit organizations received needed resources and volunteers left reflecting on the meaning of Dr. King's life of service.

Two short months later, the COVID-19 pandemic hit communities across the nation, impacting every aspect of daily life. As stay-at-home orders were issued and schools and businesses temporarily closed, our own community experienced the tension and strain of an unpredictable and volatile environment.

At the height of the pandemic, grocery store shelves were empty, and charitable food organizations were overwhelmed. Volunteers were sent home due to safety concerns around a new concept: "social distancing".

Despite the obvious constraints, the Charlotte community quickly came together to mitigate the effects of the global pandemic and volunteerism went virtual.

### VIRTUAL VOLUNTEERING

Crisis Assistance Ministry, which utilizes thousands of volunteers annually at its facility to inspect, sort and display donations in its Free Store, paused in-person volunteering at the start of the pandemic. But in a very short time, it found creative and safe ways to continue to leverage the efforts of community supporters.

For example, the agency encouraged individuals,

Volunteer planting flowers at a local school during the 2019 Live United Day hosted by United Way of Central Carolinas.

## CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

families and groups to conduct virtual donation drives for clothing, household items and toiletries. They even used volunteers to help call hundreds of people in the early days of the lockdown, letting them know about the changes in the agency's processes for receiving emergency financial aid.

Several companies took up the challenge to serve Crisis Assistance Ministry virtually. CPI Security purchased full-size toiletry items and assembled them into kits. Aramark put together laundry kits that included bedding, towels, laundry detergent and dryer sheets in laundry baskets.

Organizations that engage volunteers throughout the year for large events also reconfigured their strategies. United Way's MLK Call to Service transformed first into a 21-Day Racial Equity Challenge with a closing virtual Town Hall and then returned to a solo event. Over the course of two years, these events reached over 20,000 participants through online learning and virtual service components.

The events were built around daily emails aimed at helping develop more effective social justice habits around issues of race, power, privilege and leadership. In addition, both events incorporated socially distanced donation drives to collect children's books by Black authors and notebooks, socks and hygiene items and non-perishable food, which were distributed to nonprofits serving the Charlotte region.

Companies found creative ways to support these donation drives—Atrium Health set up multiple donation sites to make participation easy and convenient for teammates, who contributed over 6,500 items for local nonprofits.

Other companies sought out deeper engagement opportunities for their employees – not simply performing good deeds, but thinking through the root causes of inequities that make such good deeds necessary.

TIAA, for example, sponsors and recruits employees and senior-level executives to participate in a workshop on racial equity for nonprofit board members offered by United Way. This multi-day workshop provides volunteers with the information and tools necessary to move the conversation of nonprofit governance beyond a recognition of who is served and why they need assistance. Its goal is to help board members understand the historic and current systems that lead to inequities, and how those systems can be dismantled, so that they can become allies in helping advance racial equity inside the organizations they lead.

#### **EVOLVING FOR COMMUNITY NEEDS**

Although aspects of virtual volunteerism are here to stay – Crisis Assistance Ministry is continuing to promote remote donation drives and United Way will embed virtual service into its annual MLK event – some companies are ready to get back together and volunteer in person.

Lowe's, which has been able to support a number of in-person projects during the pandemic by following safety practices such as social distancing and masking, is looking forward to bringing volunteers together again this spring. On April 30, the company will serve as a presenting sponsor for Live United Day, a day of volunteer service that spotlights the efforts of United Way to make a positive difference in disinvested communities through its United



UNITED WAY WORLDWIDE



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TOP:  
Live United  
volunteers  
gardening.

BOTTOM:  
Corporate  
volunteers  
assembling baby  
blankets for Baby  
Bundles at the  
2020 MLK Call to  
Service.

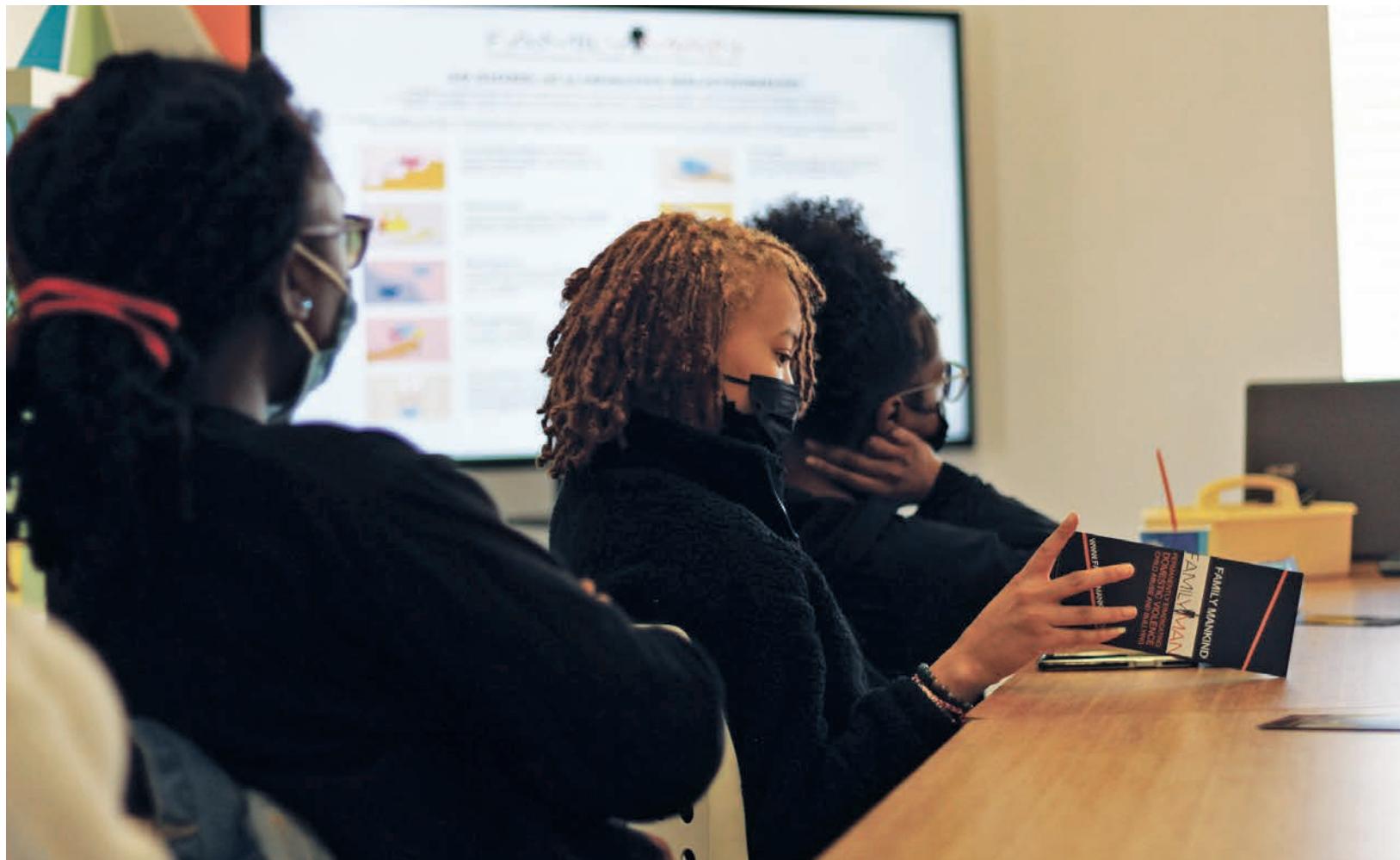
Neighborhoods program.

Through resident-driven revitalization efforts to improve economic mobility for individuals and families, United Neighborhoods strives to ensure that a person's zip code no longer determines their future success. Volunteers will help with projects like general upkeep and beautification, basic property maintenance for seniors and various assignments at neighborhood schools.

Volunteers serve a vital role in strengthening communities, assisting neighbors and advancing organizational missions, programs and services. Whether assembling hygiene kits for the homeless, organizing a food drive for the hungry or gathering school supplies for young children, volunteering has a positive impact on communities and those who lend their time and energy to help others.

The COVID-19 pandemic undoubtedly changed the way people lived, worked and socialized—as well as volunteered. Across the Charlotte region, individuals and organizations continue to find innovative ways to safely mobilize volunteers to serve neighbors and communities in need. ■

## LEARNING THROUGH SERVICE



THE ACADEMY OF GOAL ACHIEVERS

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**ACCENTURE CAN TEACH THEM HOW TO OPERATE AS A BUSINESS. IT'S A WONDERFUL COMPLEMENT TO UNITED WAY'S MENU OF AGENCY SUPPORTS.”**

**SAM SMITH JR.,**  
*United Way of Central Carolinas director of external engagement*

# ACCENTURE VOLUNTEERS ADDRESS SKILLS-BASED NEEDS

**Since 2016,** United Way of Central Carolinas has expanded its support of local nonprofit organizations to include smaller, grassroots agencies led by people of color. This initiative, known as Unite Charlotte, has provided more than 50 organizations with funding and capacity-building training to help them increase their impact and achieve long-term stability. However, providing these agencies with volunteer support has been more complicated.

Because these agencies were smaller and typically early in their life cycles, many didn't have the bandwidth to utilize volunteers on an episodic basis. They needed volunteers who could offer more consistency, and more customized support to address agency-specific needs. With this objective in mind, United Way met with Accenture, a professional services company specializing in information technology services and business consulting, to explore solutions.

“As Accenture and United Way of Central Carolinas were discussing partnership options, we thought about what each organization brought to the table,” said Christina Murtaugh, Accenture manager. “For Accenture, we can provide teams of people, all with different skillsets and areas of expertise, to solve business problems. Unite Charlotte provides small, grassroots organizations a runway to develop business and organizational capacity

to expand impact in our communities. Combining these two was an opportunity to bring our best together for the community.”

Sam Smith, Jr., United Way of Central Carolinas director of external engagement, saw the partnership of Unite Charlotte executive directors and Accenture volunteers as a potential game-changer for the agencies. “We provide our grantees with a lot of training to help them operate as a nonprofit,” he said. “But Accenture can teach them how to operate as a business. It's a wonderful complement to United Way's menu of agency supports.”

The program that Accenture and United Way co-created involved pairing teams of five to eight volunteers with executive directors of a handful of agencies. Over the course of ten weeks, they worked together to identify, understand and provide solutions to issues that were hampering the agency's growth. The team approach,

## LEARNING THROUGH SERVICE



**UNITE CHARLOTTE**, provides funding and capacity-building programs to local grassroots organizations advancing racial equity and addressing economic mobility. Through this initiative, United Way of Central Carolinas supports 55 grassroots organizations – the majority founded and led by people of color.

Unite Charlotte was founded in 2016 following civil unrest sparked by the killing of Keith Lamont Scott, an unarmed Black man, by Charlotte police. Its purpose is to address the structural racism that exists within the nonprofit sector and in the broader community. Through this initiative, organizations working outside the spotlight to support and empower disinvested communities have received millions of dollars in grants ranging from \$5,000 to \$60,000, as well as thousands of hours of capacity-building training.

United Way funding, technical assistance and guidance help to stabilize and grow these nonprofits, preparing them to secure additional public and private funding. United Way also works to strengthen the leadership capabilities within Unite Charlotte organizations to grow a more diverse and inclusive pipeline of leaders for Charlotte's nonprofit sector.

This year, Unite Charlotte expanded its funding to \$3 million, up from \$1 million in 2021 – thanks to increased



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support by Mecklenburg County. The additional investment helped pilot an innovative program sponsored by Charlotte's Children & Family Services Center, which connects some of the grassroots agencies to back-office services such as human resources, IT and finance functions, allowing them to focus on program delivery. ■

as opposed to one-on-one engagement, was a key component of the program.

"Given the breadth of specialties, industry knowledge and skills that Accenture employees have," said Madison Hensley, Accenture management consultant, "a group-based model allows for well-rounded perspectives and solutions to collaborate with our partners."

Courtne Coble, the founder and CEO of The Academy of Goal Achievers, agreed that it was helpful for Unite Charlotte grantees to work with a group. "The team approach was awesome because the process was very streamlined," she said. "It allowed more individuals to bring their expertise to the experience."

While United Way connected with agencies interested in participating, Accenture recruited its volunteer teams. "We used a variety of channels to push out requests through local office programming, promoting to local account teams, advertising through Employee Resource Groups, direct support through local leadership and word of mouth," said Hensley. "By the time we kicked off, we had gathered local Charlotte volunteers, volunteers from other regions and even international volunteers."

One of those Charlotte-based volunteers was Nick Stoneberg. He said that the chance to work with a local organization was appealing to him. "For me, I am often not working with clients within the Charlotte Metro region," he said. "But I find [volunteering] to be an important aspect of supporting the community I live and work in. This was a tangible way for me to use my consulting background to help support and transform a growing nonprofit in our area."

For The Academy of Goal Achievers, whose mission is to develop youth leaders and prepare high school students and their parents for post-secondary education and careers, a barrier to growth was the need to increase capacity for training Career Coaching volunteers.



**MADISON HENSLEY**  
Accenture management consultant



**CHRISTINA MURTAUGH**  
Accenture manager

Through the Accenture program, the group was able to create a Career Coach Playbook that standardized the training for those Coaches.

"The Accenture team was able to help us flush out our Career Coach framework for our volunteers," said Coble, who founded The Academy in 2015. "This will allow us to train volunteers and ensure they have ample resources at their fingertips to be effective in their integral role. Now we can serve more students who may not want to participate in our mentoring program, but would prefer our Career Coach program."

As is the case with many volunteer experiences, there is a lasting impact not only for the recipient agency, but also for the volunteer. "I was able to develop a new perspective for the challenges that are on the forefront of our community leaders' minds," said Stoneberg. "One particular experience that shaped the way I spent our 10 weeks together, was from one of our first calls. Our agency partner CEO had arrived a few minutes late, but had just gotten off the phone with community members who were processing a tragedy that had happened the night before. He shared this story and how it impacted how he would focus his week, but it ultimately impacted how I entered into the work we had ahead of us. It was important to create a plan forward, but it was certainly more important to be empathetic and compassionate to ensure we capture this essence into who they hope to be in the next few years as a nonprofit."

Both United Way and Accenture are looking forward to the continuation of this volunteer program, and enhancing the impact of dozens of additional small nonprofits. According to Murtaugh, "Accenture's corporate citizenship approach is evolving to expand our impact in the communities we live. The historical model of one-off volunteer events created point in time impacts. Where we want to grow is longer term investments." ■

**UNITED TO INNOVATE**

# Lowe's Volunteers Improve Communities During Pandemic

**During the COVID-19 pandemic**, while many companies made adjustments to accommodate remote work for their employees, essential retailers such as Lowe's had to find ways to keep their store associates safe while keeping their doors open. Additionally, Lowe's had to evaluate whether its efforts to support community needs through in-person events and volunteerism could safely continue – and if so, how.

For years, Lowe's has supported communities where its associates live and work. Through product donations, volunteerism and nonprofit partnerships, Lowe's has positively impacted thousands of communities in the United States, Canada and India. However, as COVID-19 began to take hold in the early months of 2020, Lowe's was forced to institute a moratorium on group activities to help ensure the safety of its people.

Over time, as the world learned and adopted ways to mitigate the risks of catching or transmitting the virus – the moratorium was gradually lifted, and associates were again empowered to volunteer. The company also amplified its disaster response program through donations to nonprofit organizations and Bucket Brigade initiative. An ongoing initiative, Lowe's associates fill buckets with supplies like rubber gloves, trash bags, and dust masks that are then distributed to communities impacted by natural disasters.

The easing of restrictions also allowed Lowe's to celebrate its 100th birthday in 2021 by launching the 100 Hometowns initiative. The goal of 100 Hometowns was to complete 100 impact projects in communities across the country, helping to rebuild after natural disasters, repair critical housing, restore community centers and green spaces, and more. More than 2,000 project applications were received, and the 100 selected projects activated 1,851 Lowe's volunteers as well as 4,597 community volunteers in 36 states.

One of the 100 Hometowns projects took place in Charlotte, where Lowe's funded the design and construction of a new park in the Washington Heights neighborhood.

Lowe's and its associates are committed to creating long-term opportunities to serve in its communities. ■



## UNITED TO INNOVATE



PHOTOS BY MARCELLO AQUINO PHOTOGRAPHY

Lowe's employee volunteers assisting with construction of a new park in the Washington Heights neighborhood, as part of their 100 Hometowns impact projects.