

Moving the Needle on Social Impact Across the Globe

Three recent stories celebrate the kind of progress possible from Steelcase involvement in the community

Photo taken October 2019, courtesy of The Women's Foundation

Today more than ever, people understand how interconnected the world is and the intrinsic obligations human beings have to each other. It has also become clearer than ever that meaningful, systemic change can occur when governments, nonprofits and businesses work together and play their parts in achieving shared goals.

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KIM DABBS | Steelcase’s global director of social innovation

At Steelcase, social responsibility has long been both a tradition and a trajectory for moving forward. “Here, our purpose is to unlock the promise of people, and that shared sense of purpose is embedded in our culture,” explains Kim Dabbs, Steelcase’s global director of social innovation. “Our purpose is at the heart of what we provide to our customers and how we operate. It also extends to the communities where we live and work. Over and over, across cultures and geographies, Steelcase employees have shown that they’re eager to jump in, connect with needs and mobilize resources to make an impact. It’s a really beautiful thing to see.”

Although COVID-19 constrained some volunteer opportunities in 2020, it also generated new creative thinking about how the company can continue to make a difference for good. Here are three recent stories that celebrate the kind of progress possible from Steelcase involvement.

GROW 1000, GRAND RAPIDS, MICHIGAN, USA

Last summer, Steelcase partnered with GRow 1000, a city-sponsored summer employment program for teens and young adults in neighborhoods that have been hit hardest by disparities, including COVID-19. The goal of the program was to provide summer employment that would enhance participants’ job readiness, build their confidence and allow them to explore future career interests — while earning an income at the same time.

As a participating employer, Steelcase designed weekly programs that paired participants with employee teams in key areas of our business — HR, research, product design, IT, operations, strategy, sales, marketing and communications. This structure provided hands-on, tangible learning experiences while exposing participants to a wide range of potential roles and opportunities.

In addition, Steelcase introduced participants to projects in several community organizations with which the company has ongoing partnerships. As a result, they were involved in activities as diverse as food distribution, park beautification, a museum education project and furthering public art spaces. “Working with students from the GRow 1000 program was transformational for me,” says Cordell Zachery, diversity recruitment specialist at Steelcase. “It reiterated the fact that our work at Steelcase is bigger than we think and we’re actively shaping the future of talent, especially in our communities.”

SOCIAL ACADEMY, MUNICH, GERMANY

In October, Steelcase employees supported Social Academy, a joint engagement of over 20 companies and 226 volunteers who came together to offer pro bono support to 2,541 participating nonprofit employees. The goal of the initiative was to empower nonprofit organizations and social enterprises, helping them amplify their local impact by providing business knowledge from corporate volunteers in online seminars and individual coaching sessions. From strategic planning and modern recruiting practices to sharing expert insights on the future of the post-COVID workplace, Steelcase employees donated their time and talent in a variety of fields. The initiative provided an interactive platform for cross-sector collaboration and gave organizations the opportunity to expand on innovative ideas in an educational format.

Christiane Winckler, Steelcase learning group consultant, shared her expertise in two coaching sessions. “It was extremely interesting, beneficial and enlightening — not only for the nonprofits but also for me,” she reports. “I gained understanding that topics and challenges do not differ much,” regardless of whether one works in a large corporation or a small enterprise.

WOMEN’S FOUNDATION, HONG KONG

Steelcase Asia Pacific partners with [The Women’s Foundation](#), which challenges gender stereotypes, empowers women in poverty and advances women leaders. Lani Tao, global account manager in Hong Kong, currently sits on the advisory council for the Women’s Foundation, supporting the organization through ongoing mentorships with a focus on alumni engagement.

She also represents Steelcase as a female ally for the foundation’s Male Allies Initiative, which aims to promote more inclusive conversations about gender equality. Its members are men who champion the importance of gender equality and are able to drive real change in their spheres of influence, in and out of the workplace.

“Women aren’t asking for better treatment than men. We are asking for the equal opportunity to grow,” says Tao. “What leadership can do when making hiring or promotion decisions is to ask if this person’s resume would look any different if it were coming from a man instead of a woman, or from a woman instead of a man? Answering that question can help remove gender from your decision.”

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