

Social Responsibility

The Power Of Associations To Make The World A Better Place

By Karen Brost

Giving back, going green and making a difference are just a few of the many phrases used to describe social responsibility — or SR — initiatives. But they all share a single goal: doing the right thing for the local and global community. And associations are increasingly finding that the more they work toward that goal through meetings and conventions, the more their own organizations benefit as well.

“I think it’s important to note that social responsibility is not a new initiative for many organizations,” said Susan Sarfati, CAE, president and CEO of The Center for Association Leadership and executive vice president, American Society of Association Executives (ASAE). “Each organization is unique in terms of how it defines social responsibility and how that feeds into the fulfillment of its mission. “But, what we are starting to see is organizations really integrating social responsibility into every aspect of planning, budgeting and operations. That is a big change for many groups, where SR thinking is pervasive, and

they have conducted a value audit and made the business case for social responsibility. That is one of the points we are emphasizing, that being socially responsible can positively affect your bottom line, through actual cost savings and through increased member recruitment and retention.”

UNEXPECTED HEROICS

Sometimes, social responsibility opportunities present themselves unexpectedly. Just ask Joann Boughman, executive vice president of the American Society of Human Genetics (ASHG) located in Bethesda, MD. Her group arrived in San Diego last October for its annual human genetics conference at about the same time as the San Diego wildfires.

“It came upon us so suddenly that we really didn’t have time to plan,” Boughman recalled. ASHG sent out regular e-mail blasts to all registrants to keep them updated on the situation. “The convention center people, the city personnel and the public affairs people were absolutely terrific working with us,” she said.