

Event report

ENGAGING WITH LONDON COMMUNITIES: A DISCUSSION ON CORPORATE ENGAGEMENT

an event in partnership with NPC and hosted by
Macquarie Group Foundation

05.12.2012



VENUE

Macquarie Group Foundation
28 Ropemaker Street
London
EC2Y 9HD

This event brought together people engaged in corporate giving and corporate social responsibility within a wide range of companies and professional adviser firms. We heard from two companies which have found ways to contribute to the community in partnership with charitable foundations. Their outcomes offer many pointers to effective practice. London is perhaps the most complex city in the world, so the challenge for the meeting was how to plan community engagement for London-based companies that really does support local communities and pressing needs, and meet company objectives without wasting time and money.

Macquarie Group is a global provider of banking, financial, advisory, investment and fund management services. Macquarie has contributed more than £107 million globally to over 1,300 community organisations around the world since it was established in 1985, making it a leading Australia corporate donor. Macquarie aims to support communities wherever its staff live and work through giving, volunteering and sharing their expertise. The bedrock in each place is engagement with valuable local community activity. In London Macquarie staff have long worked with local people and projects in East London and more recently in Islington.

Land Securities is the largest commercial property company in the UK and has chosen to do some of its London-based giving through London Community Foundation, using the Foundation's energy, knowledge of community development and very good networks, including grassroots groups, and its track record of managing varied funds efficiently. Working with the Foundation enables Land Securities to target its corporate giving to benefit key groups of people, complementing its wider London employment strategy.

Bharat Mehta (Chief Executive, Trust for London) began by talking about poverty and need in London and pointed meeting participants to well-analysed data to help with their decisions. London's Poverty Profile is a website updated quarterly (www.londonpovertyprofile.org.uk) that collates data from many sources and shows vividly the good and the challenging about London. The last census showed London's population shifting, e.g. more young people in inner London and fewer old people. The biggest challenge in London's bad poverty statistics (4 in 10 of London's children live in poor households) is that the families bearing the brunt include a family member in paid employment but with low pay or limited hours. Unemployment has also been rising and it is London's young people who are likeliest to be unemployed even though their average qualifications are better than elsewhere in the UK. In 2011 there were 5,700 rough sleepers in London: this figure is higher now. Trust for London shares this knowledge widely and also uses it to inform its own funding priorities - supporting employment development, tackling poverty and helping provide advice - all within a commitment to social justice. Many of the issues the Trust's funding tackles, such as modern day slavery, affect the most marginalised people in our society.

“...the families bearing the brunt of poverty include a family member in paid employment but with low pay or limited hours”

Rachel Engel (Manager, EMEA, Macquarie Group Foundation) and **Kristina Glenn** (Director, Cripplegate Foundation) told the story of how Cripplegate and other agencies working together as Islington Giving helped Macquarie refocus some of its community engagement on Islington when it moved its headquarters into the borough. Islington is a borough where it is easy to see prosperity and advantage, yet it is the borough with the shortest male life expectancy anywhere in the country, the highest reported level of domestic violence and the second highest poverty level in London. Islington Giving was formed to raise both awareness and funding (almost £2 million in its first two years). Rachel and Kristina described a unique partnership which has included the careful placement of Macquarie staff in charities and community groups needing business skills, for example in writing a plan or working on ideas for organisational change. The links are time-limited and carefully defined around creating strategic change in organisations. They have often stretched the Macquarie staffs' skills and experience and have been transformative for the voluntary groups. Often the staff member has stayed involved after the formal period. Rachel shared a lot of detail about some of these experiences and their impact. Macquarie has now also invested in Islington Giving through funding the BIG Alliance (BIG = Businesses for Islington Giving) which the East London Business Alliance helped establish.

“careful placement of Macquarie staff in charities and community groups needing business skills”

Francis Salway (recently retired CEO of Land Securities and now Chair of London Community Foundation) and **Debbie Akehurst** (Land Securities' Head of Corporate Responsibility, London) discussed Land Securities' giving done through London Community Foundation with its CEO, **Sonal Shah**. Land Securities is a significant giver nationally with its own Foundation and clear strategic priorities around community engagement and environmental responsibility. Nonetheless they value their link with London Community Foundation through which they have created an endowed fund whose income is used in grantmaking in support of employability, especially for young people, and addressing housing issues and homelessness. This fund is a clear statement that the company is not “here today, gone tomorrow” in its commitment to London communities. It gives discretion to the Foundation to direct funding to the communities around London that they know very well. Among the benefits of doing its giving this way, Land Securities can refer all local London enquiries to the Foundation without having to say “no”. They have seen their funding used to lever matching government challenge grants (Grassroots Grants and Communities First), thus achieving even better value. Their example has resulted in other significant companies coming in as donors alongside their funding. For grantmaking decisions, Land Securities have chosen to have some direct involvement and so staff members sit on selection panels.

“This (Land Securities) fund is a clear statement that the company is not “here today, gone tomorrow” in its commitment to London communities.”

Francis ended by noting that he is a personal donor to his local community foundation as well, having seen how the link with the foundation can help in becoming a more intelligent philanthropist, making grants with bigger impact.

Question and answer session with the presenters

Questions included some probing about whether Macquarie staff had any training before jumping in to work with voluntary organisations, and also how they kept track of the value to the business from individual staff time. Rachel noted that the staff give their own time in this work though the company has a rough measurement of the time volunteered and she undertakes evaluation at the start, middle and end of the initially agreed period. She encourages staff to feed back to their managers about what they are doing so the new or enhanced skill-set can be judged. She is looking at how to build this involvement into the company's leadership training. Land Securities is part of the London Benchmarking Group and measures its engagement that way.

Francis described Land Securities as being part of a community of funders through its involvement with the community foundation. He sees how important this is in stimulating good work at very local level but also appreciates the value of pooling knowledge at London level.

A lively networking event took place after this discussion.

“...the value of pooling knowledge at London level”

With thanks to Macquarie Group Foundation for their support in hosting this meeting.