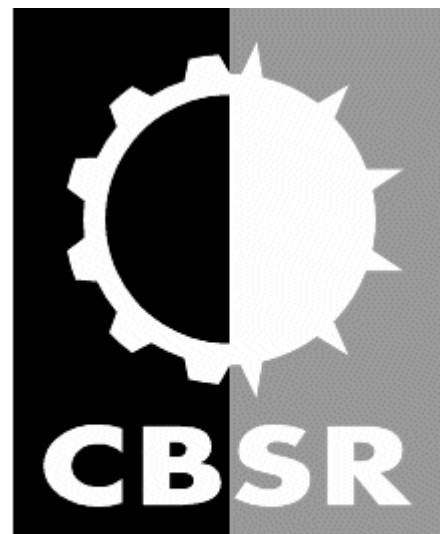


**Building a Corporate  
Social Responsibility Plan -  
Using a Systems Approach**

**Canadian Business for  
Social Responsibility  
(CBSR)**



**CANADIAN BUSINESS FOR  
SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY**



## **A business planning approach to CSR requires discipline and focus:**

Developing a Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Plan can feel a bit overwhelming. The definition of what CSR is and what it means at an operational level within business, is constantly developing and maturing. This is why we, at Canadian Business for Social Responsibility (CBSR), believe in a disciplined planning approach to implementing CSR.

**The breadth of CSR...** We have developed, with our member companies, a step-by-step planning and assessment tool – the *GoodCompany*<sup>1</sup> Guidelines for Corporate Social Performance. These guidelines are organized into six main stakeholder groups<sup>2</sup>:

1. **Community:** the scope of community practices among socially responsible companies ranges from articulating a commitment to the community to involving community representatives in developing key indicators for measuring a company's social performance.
2. **Employees:** the scope of employee practices among socially responsible companies ranges from paying employees on time to involving them in defining employee programs and key indicators of success of those programs.
3. **Customers:** the scope of customer practices among socially responsible companies ranges from marketing products and services truthfully to involving customers in establishing indicators for customer satisfaction.
4. **Shareholders:** the scope of shareholder practices among socially responsible companies ranges from implementing fiscal policies to involving shareholders in defining both the financial and non-financial direction of the company.
5. **Suppliers:** the scope of supplier practices among socially responsible companies ranges from incorporating social and environmental values into purchasing decisions to involving suppliers in evaluating the success of supplier contracts
6. **The Environment:** The scope of environmental practices among socially responsible companies ranges from complying with all environmental laws and regulations to engaging environmental experts and non-governmental organizations in establishing key performance indicators and evaluating the success of environmental programs.

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<sup>1</sup> CBSR *GoodCompany* Guidelines for Corporate Social Performance, Copyright 2001:  
[www.goodcompany.ca](http://www.goodcompany.ca)

<sup>2</sup> A stakeholder is any person, group, or entity that is impacted directly or indirectly by a business' activities or that directly or indirectly impacts on the business' activities. This includes but is not limited to community members, employees and their families, customers, suppliers, shareholders, community and environment groups, politicians, professional and academic organizations, the biosphere, world population and future generations.



**And, the depth of CSR...** Typically, socially responsible initiatives are implemented along a continuum:

1. Begin with an internal (and/or public) **commitment** to the initiative;
2. Develop a **policy** to formalize and articulate the commitment;
3. Create **programs** to implement the policy;
4. **Evaluate** the success of the programs and **measure** the progress;
5. Involve key **stakeholders** in program development and evaluation; and
6. Become accountable for this commitment by **reporting** on the initiative.

Each of these points in the continuum represent deeper levels of commitment and higher degrees of sophistication. This is what is typically called a systems approach to implementing CSR. Within the system, there is a built in process of continuous improvement. As the company works through the CSR continuum, their commitment is likely to deepen. Opportunities to strengthen a company's commitment will surface, and through the systems approach, internal policies, programs and management systems can be revised and refreshed to ensure that corporate performance is improved.

#### **A step-by-step approach ensures realistic goals and outcomes – first things first:**

**Begin with a self-assessment...** Do a quick self assessment or gap analysis to determine what socially responsible initiatives your company has implemented, and the level of depth of that commitment (policy, program, management system, etc.). You can complete this yourself using a tool like the *GoodCompany* Guidelines, or you can invite an independent third part social audit consultant to come in and do this work for you.

**Determine your company's priority areas...** Record your company's strengths and weaknesses and prioritize them in a way that meets your company's needs. You may want to begin with a "risk" approach and flag those gaps that may cause reputational and/or financial risk to your enterprise. You may want to take a cost/benefit approach to priority setting, identifying those initiatives that are the most cost effective to implement. You may wish to begin with a combination of the two. This is a critical step and we encourage you to develop your priority-setting criteria early on.

**Establish a code of conduct...** Outline your basic CSR principles in a code of conduct that will be used to inform all business decisions and actions. Write this commitment up in simple language and by all means, make it inspirational. This will become your "north star", work with your staff, suppliers, community, customers and other relevant stakeholders to ensure that you are all shoulder to shoulder – moving in the same direction.



## **A few things to think about before you begin**

Consider the big picture: as the self appointed stewards of the planet, we could be doing a better job. From climate change to food security to international labour conditions and the imbalanced distribution of wealth, it is clear that our current path is neither desirable nor sustainable. Here we have a choice.

At CBSR, we recognize that businesses have an opportunity and responsibility to be part of the solution. A systems approach to planning offers companies a step-by-step approach to CSR integration and improvement. For these actions to transform into significant and lasting change it is important for company owners and leaders to ask themselves a few fundamental questions about their business.

### **Does your company have a strategic vision that answers the following questions...**

1. How does your company impact on the lives of the people it touches?
2. How does your company help to create a more fair, just and compassionate world?
3. Do you have a vision of your company as environmentally sustainable, and are we on the correct path to achieve that vision?

Long-term success in this journey to sustainability is achieved when social and environmental criteria are embedded right into your company's core business practices, into its strategic vision and planning, and, consequently into its overall culture. This is a big step for most companies. It is challenging, but both critical and possible. Understanding the overall impact of your company's product or service is something you need to consider from the outset and every step of the way.

The deepest level of corporate social responsibility occurs when a company leads by example, encouraging and supporting others to adopt social and environmental initiatives themselves. It is this leadership that builds a culture and community of responsible businesses, setting new standards for future generations and framing the challenge for tomorrow's environmental and social innovators.

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