

# Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)

## What?

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) can be defined as “...voluntary activities undertaken by a company to operate in an economically, socially, and environmentally sustainable manner.” [Source]

CSR activities may include:

- Regular donations to charity and/or sponsorships,
- Initiatives to reduce environmental impact (carbon footprint, energy use, waste, etc.)
- Active initiatives to incorporate best practices in equity, diversity, and inclusion,
- Efforts to promote workplace health and safety,
- Transparent policies, such as an anti-discrimination policy or sustainability policy. [Source]

CSR activities are **NOT**:

- Greenwashing (when firms produce products that appear deceptively green while not actually being sustainable),
- Simple compliance with basic ethics/labor/environment laws; CSR should go beyond laws to promote sustainability [Source],
- Supporting or funding unethical or unsustainable activities such as weapons dealing or destructive oil or mineral extraction.

Examples of CSR:

- The **B Factory**, in Sainte-Anne-de-Bellevue, makes a clear effort to reduce waste, while also supporting local and global projects that are in alignment with their mission.
- CN Rail operates their **EcoConnexions Programs**, which include community tree planting and employee engagement.

## Why?

Events with corporate sponsors can have impacts that extend beyond the immediate time and place of the event. Whether through their direct operations or investments, firms of all sizes can pose significant risks to ecosystems and humans alike. When planning an event involving a corporate sponsor, partner with firms that consider and mitigate the potential environmental, social, and economic impacts of their operations. *In short, find sponsors that actively integrate CSR into their operations.*

## How?

When choosing sponsors for your event, set aside time to do some research in advance. Look for information about both the sustainable and harmful impacts of a company's operations.

1. Check if your prospective sponsor has a public statement on their website or media channels about CSR. Many firms will publish plans of action and report on progress towards sustainability goals either on their website or in their annual reports. [Source]
2. Do a Google search about the impacts the company has on the environment and society. Often, information about harmful operations (e.g. investing in fossil fuels) can be found online.
3. For publicly traded companies, information about their activities (investments, sustainable efforts, partnerships or projects, etc.) can often be found in their annual reports.
4. If such information cannot be found online, communicate with the sponsor(s) and ask for a detailed explanation of any CSR policies.
5. You can also consult several lists and rankings that include certified socially responsible firms:

Certified



Corporation

**B-Corp** - a rigorous certification system for corporations that pursue environmental, social, and governance sustainability



**Fair Trade** - certification for products with sustainable supply chains and producers



**1% For the Planet** - corporations that give back 1% of earnings to environmental sustainability



**Corporate Knights Global 100 list** - a ranking of the top 100 most sustainable global corporations

At the end of the day, whether a company demonstrates CSR may be unclear. Firms may have both positive policies and harmful impacts. It may be up to you as an event planner to weigh which is more significant. As always, you can reach out to [events.sustainability@mcgill.ca](mailto:events.sustainability@mcgill.ca) for more help.

Lastly, be clear with event attendees on the intent of the sponsorship agreement. Being transparent and up-front with information on where the money goes and why the partnership exists may build more trust between all event stakeholders.