

RESTORAT

After years of helping a variety of causes, Aspect Consulting

Aspect Consulting employees volunteered their time by helping Stewardship Partners to plant nearly 1,000 shrubs and trees along the Snoqualmie River.



LIVE SPIRITS


formalized the firm's philanthropic efforts to amplify their collective impact

Since the firm's founding in 2001, Aspect Consulting executives and employees have donated time, money and expertise to worthy causes. But for years, the philanthropic efforts were largely chosen by the company's leadership, according to Tim Flynn, president and co-founder of the firm which has seven offices in Washington state and Oregon and specializes in sustainable development and restoration.

"Historically, we have given a part of our proceeds to charity and also provided some pro bono consulting," Flynn says. "We became more organized about it around five years ago as part of our strategic planning process. Community giving came up as an important goal, and we wanted to involve a broader cross section of our staff."

That strategic planning process resulted in the Aspect Community Team (ACT). The group organizes a handful of volunteering events each year, and Flynn hopes to grow ACT's role over time with employees eventually helping to decide where the firm's charity dollars are donated. According to Flynn, Aspect Consulting has always tried to keep its corporate donations above industry benchmarks while also encouraging employee involvement. But with the ACT group, Flynn hopes to create a companywide culture that emphasizes corporate responsibility.

"We are trying to engage our staff, as opposed to it being a top-down process," Flynn says. "It is a meaningful thing for folks to be able to share the gifts that we have, and those gifts can be anything from our time to our dollars to our expertise. There are a lot of needs out there, and not enough resources to cover those needs. It is rewarding to help out."



Lisa Maeda, of Aspect Consulting's human resources team, helps with treeplanting along the Snoqualmie River.

THE BROADER PICTURE

The ACT group consists of a small, core set of employees who plan and coordinate volunteer events. Owen Reese, a senior associate water resources engineer at Aspect, was one of the earliest members of the group. However, Reese credits Meilani Lanier-Kamaha'o, a project geologist at Aspect, for bringing new life to the effort when she joined the firm two years ago. Together, the duo serve as co-leaders of ACT.

According to Reese, the group has made an effort to partner with organizations that can either make use of employees' valuable skill sets or at least have some sort of thematic tie-in to Aspect Consulting's environmental work. For instance, the ACT group has done several projects with Stewardship Partners, a Seattle-based land and water protection organization.

"It is very intentional," Reese says. "We had an early discussion about, 'Do we want to get involved with a broad range of organizations, or do we want to have a narrow focus?' We decided we wanted to work on things that line up with Aspect's focus on earth and water resources, and we felt there was real value in helping where we can bring more than just



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Aspect Consulting staff donated engineering expertise as well as labor to design and help plant a pair of rain gardens for Carnation Elementary School.

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Lanier-Kamaha'o believes volunteer events like habitat restoration feel meaningful for Aspect employees because of the connection to their day-to-day work.

"Our employees all spend time working on projects that deal with the downstream impacts from upstream waters," she says. "Something as simple as planting a tree—anyone can do that. But doing upstream habitat restoration with a team of colleagues that you regularly work with on urban cleanup sites is a very powerful reminder of the broader goals of our firm."

LOCAL IMPACT

In one of the first big projects organized by ACT, employees helped Stewardship Partners design and build two rain gardens at an elementary school in Carnation, Washington. The goal of the project was to replace invasive vegetation, create wildlife habitat and infiltrate runoff from approximately 6,500 square feet of the school's roof.

"A lot of people in our company have described how much they enjoyed doing that work," says Lanier-Kamaha'o. "We are lucky. We are in the right spot where we have the skills, and we

Aspect in Action

In addition to the ACT team's activities, a number of Aspect Consulting employees volunteer for their own individual causes and passion projects. Here's a sampling:

Bureau of Fearless Ideas – Jen Koogler, a technical editor and marketing coordinator with Aspect, has volunteered with the Greater Seattle Bureau of Fearless Ideas (BFI) for over a decade. BFI is a nonprofit writing and tutoring center, and Koogler works with a group of high school students that tutors younger kids.

Engineers Without Borders – Dave Cook, principal geologist and part owner of Aspect, has been involved with Engineers Without Borders-USA for a dozen years. He has assumed many roles, from chapter president, student mentor, served on the board of directors, was board president in 2016, and currently serves on the board of directors for EWB-Guatemala (EWB's first in-country office). Aspect has also made financial contributions to EWB.

All Hands Volunteers – Henry Haselton, principal geotechnical engineer with Aspect, has worked with All Hands Volunteers to help rebuild schools that were destroyed due to the Nepal earthquake in 2015. Haselton provided pro bono engineering services to the organization, helping with site development and foundation recommendations for schools such as the East Point Academy in Melamchi, about 25 miles northeast of Kathmandu.

can do something more specific than a general fundraiser or a supplies drive for the school.”

When the firm’s Seattle office moved in 2018, Aspect employees took advantage of the downtime by helping Stewardship Partners with a riparian restoration effort along the Snoqualmie River, planting nearly 1,000 shrubs and trees—including western red cedar and cottonwood trees and snowberry and salmonberry shrubs. The plantings provide cooling shade, control erosion and provide habitat for hundreds of fish and wildlife species, in addition to absorbing carbon from the air and helping to mitigate climate change.

By agreeing to perform ongoing maintenance work, the ACT group has “adopted” the habitat and is planning more rain garden projects.

Chris LaPointe, director of ecological restoration at Stewardship Partners, says ACT’s combination of technical expertise and manual labor makes its contributions especially helpful.

“They were able to produce this wonderful map and schematic for the rain garden project,” says LaPointe. “We do not have access to engineering software, and I had been racking my brain trying to create something beyond a hand-drawn map. That was a huge weight off of our shoulders, and it makes the overall project look much more professional, especially when we are pitching it to various grant sources.”

“When Aspect comes out to the field to volunteer with us, there is a common bond, because they are working with the earth and with water all the time, and so are we,” LaPointe adds. “That is huge to creating a successful partnership.”

Since the ACT group was created, employees have also participated in activities such as food drives, school science nights and environmental cleanup projects. “It is rewarding when you can see the benefits right in your community,” Lanier-Kamaha’o says.



Villagers from the town of San Francisco Jolomtaj in front of new water tank, which provides better emergency supply options and filters for blocking contaminants.



“We are in the right spot to help because we have unique technical skills to address specific needs rather than something more general like a fundraiser or a supplies drive.”

MEILANI LANIER-KAMAHA'O
PROJECT GEOLOGIST
ASPECT CONSULTING

GLOBAL MINDSET

Today, Aspect’s overall giving efforts are a blend of the leadership-driven giving the firm has always done and the emerging work of the ACT team. Aspect provides ongoing financial support to a number of organizations, both locally and internationally, and Flynn believes it is important to continue those relationships, even as he strives to give employees more say in where the firm’s dollars go.

“We want to avoid donating with ‘one-offs,’” Flynn says. “It is important for nonprofits to have confidence and consistency in their cash flow and revenue streams, and we have made it a point to be a consistent donor, so they have that sustainability.”

One of those nonprofits is the Hands for Peacemaking Foundation, a Guatemalan nonprofit that Flynn supported before Aspect was founded. In addition to directing a portion of the firm’s charity dollars to the organization, Flynn has traveled to Guatemala a number of times to help evaluate potential sites for groundwater infrastructure in remote areas and teach locals how to install wells and pumps.

According to Flynn, investing in the community is an important part of work-life balance. Furthermore, his definition of “community” extends beyond Aspect’s immediate geographical area and beyond international borders. Both perspectives resonate with employees, especially younger workers.

“Younger generations tend to think much more globally,” he says. “I am proud of the fact that the firm is engaged in the work we do internationally. We are helping institutions in our backyard as well as in developing countries that certainly need the help.”

Although ACT may still seem somewhat separate from the rest of Aspect’s efforts, Lanier-Kamaha’o believes the program has energized employees and has made the firm’s giving more visible to the rank-and-file.

“It is apparent that people are excited to be involved,” she says. “Some people, especially younger employees, will say, ‘I did not realize that we did so much charity work.’” ■

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