Member Networking: Financial Services Industry
December 5, 2025

<u>Key Insights & Takeaways</u>
1. Persistent and Emerging CSR Challenges in Financial Services
CSR leaders in financial services are navigating a demanding landscape shaped by regulatory requirements, evolving political climates, and increasing expectations for measurable community impact.

Key challenges include:
Volunteer Engagement Under Regulatory Pressure
- Due to CRA priorities, there is a focus on certain types of volunteerism, particularly skills-based activities. Companies face difficulty in securing long-term employee participation, even though one-time events remain popular.
- Remote and hybrid work further complicates engagement, with teams struggling to find appealing and accessible virtual volunteer options.

Resource Constraints and Rapid Adaptation Needs
- Shifts in federal and administrative policies have forced companies to dramatically reevaluate funding strategies, vet partners more rigorously, and pivot volunteer programs quickly.
- These shifts have created internal anxiety and operational strain as teams work to maintain impact while minimizing risk.

Program Limitations for Remote and Distributed Teams
- Many traditional volunteer programs—such as week-long or in-person opportunities—draw limited participation due to distributed workforces and time constraints.

2. Innovative Engagement Models and Tools
Participants highlighted several effective approaches for employee engagement:

- **Digital Platforms for Skills-Based Volunteering**
  Career Village, an online model where employees can provide career advice remains highly successful.
- **Leveraging Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) and Business Units**
  ERGs and internal networks are proving to be powerful drivers of volunteer participation, program visibility, and global coordination.

- **Strategic Language and Messaging Adjustments**
  Organizations are reframing program language to better reflect community needs and mitigate political sensitivities, moving toward terms that highlight potential and service instead of demographic identifiers.

3. Navigating Political and Social Change
CSR teams are increasingly required to balance mission-driven work with the realities of shifting political environments:

- **Increased Risk Sensitivity**
  Leaders reported a declining appetite for risk, particularly around partnerships that might attract political scrutiny.
  Many are leaning on established pillars and funding criteria as protective guardrails.
- **Adapting Messaging Without Losing Purpose**
  While language may need to evolve, the core mission and intended impact remain unchanged.
  Companies emphasized the importance of staying grounded in long-term goals despite external pressures.

4. Evolving Funding and Grantmaking Approaches
A noticeable shift is occurring in funding philosophy:

- **From Narrow Program Funding to Broader Systems-Based Support**
  Some are moving away from funding only financial education programs toward addressing foundational economic barriers such as affordability and capacity building. This allows organizations to meet more immediate community needs and address root causes rather than symptoms.

5. Case-Making Strategies for Leadership Engagement
Participants discussed the importance of effectively advocating for programs across multiple audiences—employees, community partners, supervisors, and executives.

- **Protective Framing in Uncertain Times**
  Risk-averse environments require clear justifications, strong alignment with existing pillars, and proactive communication to secure support.

6. Wins and Positive Momentum
Despite challenges, companies shared several encouraging developments:

- **Expanded Impact Frameworks**
  CSR teams are broadening existing pillars to include more diverse and underserved populations, increasing the relevance and reach of their work.
- **Strengthened Employee Engagement**
  Companies shared that their employee engagement data shows a strong correlation between skills-based volunteering and job satisfaction.

- **Growth in Skills-Based Volunteering Programs**
  New and expanded skills-based volunteering initiatives—both team-based and location-based—have launched successfully.
- **Enhanced Customer and Partner Engagement**
  Volunteer activities involving customers and business partners are gaining traction, helping reinforce community ties and shared purpose.
- **Leadership Recognition**
  Organizational leaders are more openly acknowledging the value of volunteerism for employee connection, community benefit, and overall culture.