How we've built and evolved our habit of giving back at Buffer

In 2020, it was more important to us than ever to support small businesses and non-profit organizations.

There are so many organizations offering essential services to their communities, and we have felt so lucky to be able to support them while continuing to support our own customers. We always want to give back each year – the amount might change, depending on our profit, but we'll always give back. It's a habit worth building and continuing.

We'd love to highlight the organizations we supported in 2020 and the important work they're doing, and how we came to support them.

An evolution of giving back and choosing flagship causes

Back in 2017, we committed to donating 20% of our profit each year to charitable organizations and, each year, we've chosen those non-profits in different ways.

The first year in 2017, we invited our team to nominate any organization they wanted and chose seven that got the most votes. It was a very open-ended prompt! In 2018, we focused our search a little bit, still taking in any team nominations but ultimately choosing one organization to represent each of our six company values.

In 2019, we put a stake in the ground and decided to focus our giving efforts on a core Buffer stakeholder — the environment. We worked to calculate our carbon footprint and found projects to fund that would prevent, remove or reduce carbon emissions of the same amount. Then, we asked our team to tell us their favorite organizations that produce clean energy, remove carbon from the atmosphere, support sustainable energy sources, or otherwise contribute toward the health of our planet, and ended up choosing five of them to support.

As we entered 2020, climate action was still a core cause we felt committed to supporting, but it became obvious that there was another area where there was significant work to be done. Combatting racial injustice and actively pursuing anti-racism became a priority for our company, and we worked to establish several programs to support BIPOC activists, as well as Black- or POC-owned or -led organizations engaged in anti-racism work.

When we started looking into our 2020 charitable donation, we decided we wanted to make a significant contribution to organizations tackling one of these two core causes — climate action and anti-racism — and that had a strong alignment with our vision: a world with more small businesses that do good while doing well.

The selection process

As we've always done, we invited our team to tell us about organizations that inspired them. Here's what we shared about each cause and why it was important to Buffer's vision:

"Without a habitable planet and the stability that provides, no small businesses will be able to thrive, including Buffer. Simultaneously, the climate challenge also creates tremendous opportunities for innovation and entrepreneurship, hence more startups and small businesses! It feels crucial to do our part in building a sustainable and healthy environment where small

businesses can have long-term success.”

“Systemic racism is not only injustice, but it is also bad for business. Research ‘estimates that aggregate economic output would have been $16 trillion higher since 2000 if racial gaps had been closed.’ When it comes to a world with more small businesses, we’ll also want to see more diversity in those businesses. By making our contribution to a more equitable and just future, we can create a world where more people from underrepresented groups can start small businesses and have the means to support small businesses within their communities.”

From these prompts, we collected team nominations and we learned about some amazing organizations. After a team-wide vote, we settled on four organizations to each receive $12,152.25 USD — an equal split of $48,609 USD, which was 20% of our profit share from 2020.

Our 2020 charities and the work they’re doing

We chose two organizations to represent our focus on anti-racism and two that represent climate action. We’re proud to support these organizations that are truly working toward a more equitable and sustainable world. Read on for more information about their work!

GiveDirectly
When we zoom out to the global level, there is huge inequality between people born and living in developed versus developing countries. The differences in wealth and access to opportunities remain massive. Currently, there is strong evidence that giving unconditional cash grants to people living in poverty is one of the most effective ways to drive positive change in their lives.

GiveDirectly gives cash grants that enable folks to invest in the projects, businesses, and items that are most impactful for them, instead of relying on organizations to choose for them. From their website: “We believe people living in poverty deserve the dignity to choose for themselves how best to improve their lives – cash enables that choice.”

We are excited about supporting GiveDirectly as a way to catalyze more small businesses – especially by folks from underrepresented groups – starting up all over the world.

digitalundivided
There is no doubt that the U.S. tech and startup scenes have long been homogenous in many ways – with race and gender in particular. We get really excited when we hear about organizations that are supporting underrepresented groups and lifting them up to get the same shot as other founders, and digitalundivided is doing just that.

At digitalundivided, they run training programs, pre-accelerator programs, and a fellowship to help Black and Latinx women founders get the resources and mentorship they need to develop their businesses. On top of that, we were excited to see that they conduct research about Black and Latinx women founders in the U.S and that they use their research as a catalyst for change and action. From their website: “At digitalundivided, we use original, proprietary research to develop a data-driven ecosystem that expands the current body of knowledge about entrepreneurship in emerging communities.”

Their mission is all about doing good while doing well – supporting Black and Latinx women in their entrepreneurship journeys, all while catalyzing economic growth in their communities.

Cool Earth
Trees are a powerhouse for our planet, constantly pulling

carbon out of the atmosphere – so deforestation is a huge contributor to the climate crisis. Cool Earth works directly with rainforest communities to halt deforestation. They do this by meeting and learning from rainforest communities around the world, many of whom are indigenous communities that have intimate relationships and immense wisdom about their local forests.

Cool Earth partners with these communities to develop solutions that are unique to each location. In many situations, they support the local communities to develop sustainable incomes so they can be self-sustaining without causing harm to the rainforests. From their website: “Cool Earth supports local and indigenous knowledge to develop innovative ways to address threats to the forest while making communities stronger and more resilient.”

Cool Earth takes a tangible climate action while empowering and supporting indigenous communities, and it’s an approach we are honored to support.

VertueLab

Cleantech is a growing industry of companies working to support the environment through clean energy, the sustainable use of resources, carbon sequestration, and more. VertueLab works to tackle the climate crisis by providing funding and entrepreneurial support to early-stage cleantech startups whose products can deliver a measurable impact on reducing greenhouse gases. They also intentionally prioritize the growth of diversity, equity, and inclusion across cleantech industries.

In other words, VertueLab is directly nurturing small businesses that strive to make a difference in the climate space, and that shape a more sustainable and equitable world. From their website: “[Our mission is] to unleash innovation and entrepreneurship that will solve environmental challenges and catalyze shared economic prosperity.”

VertueLab actively fights against the climate crisis with a very similar vision to ours — to see a world with more startups that are doing great work for the planet and doing well in the process.

Additional donations to anti-racism organizations

In mid-2020, separately from our annual profit share donations, we also committed to donating $100,000 USD to organizations for and by Black people working to dismantle racism. After consulting with our Black teammates to determine the organizations they wanted to see the money go toward, we donated to three wonderful organizations:

The Marsha P. Johnson Institute, which protects and defends the human rights of Black transgender people.

The Marshall Project, a nonpartisan, nonprofit news organization that seeks to create and sustain a sense of national urgency about the U.S. criminal justice system.

Brave Space Alliance, a Black-led, trans-led LGBTQ center designed to create and provide affirming services for the LGBTQ community of Chicago.

We encourage you to read more about these organizations and the daily impactful work they do to support Black communities.

Learnings for next year

We're a team that loves to give, though our approach up until now has been to "figure things out as we go." That's worked for us thus far, but now that we've established several charitable initiatives, we're excited to think through a more holistic approach to charitable giving.

Having our two flagship causes is a great help with this, as

is our annual choice to donate 20% of our profit. We’re committed to continuing our anti-racism programs, internally and externally, and working to be as carbon neutral as possible.

We’re honored to support these organizations and hope you’ll look into their work as well. We list even more anti-racist organizations worth supporting over here. There’s much more work to be done!

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