

INVESTMENT & MARKETS



Stir It Up: How Three Unlikely Entities Came Together to Create the Perfect Recipe for Change

Words by Andrea Newell



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At first glance, brownies and solar energy don't have much in common. Yet the SXSWeco panel *Stir It Up: Brownies + Social Mission + Solar Energy* made the case for what can happen when organizations in different industries transcend all boundaries to work together. More and more we are seeing what would have been considered unusual partnerships in the past generate amazing results and bring needed resources to many people.

Individually, [Green Mountain Energy](#), [Whole Planet Foundation](#) and [Greyston Bakery](#) each have a compelling mission and story to tell, but when they came together, they became even stronger and more able to benefit others around the globe.

Green Mountain Energy Sun Club

Green Mountain Energy (GME) is headquartered in Austin, Texas and has sold renewable energy for 16 years. It is the nation's

longest-serving renewable energy retailer. In 2002, GME started the [Sun Club](#), where customers can sign up to add extra money to their bill to be allocated toward a solar installation for a nonprofit of their choice. Nonprofits sign up for the Sun Club to have solar panels put on the roof of their building for free. The funds go to pay for the equipment, and Green Mountain Energy oversees the installation.

To date, GME has completed 50 donations/installations, more than 575 kw in 22 cities totalling \$2.3 million in donations. The company estimates that those facilities will prevent more than 887,900 lbs. of CO2 emissions each year, or the equivalent of 981,600 miles not driven, or 915,500 newspapers recycled, not landfilled, or 2.9 million aluminum cans recycled.

After the installation is in place, Katie Ryan, PR Manager of GME says, "It's like we are giving each nonprofit money every month in the form of what they save on utility bills."

Greyston Bakery

Greyston Bakery was one of the nonprofits that signed up to receive a solar installation. The bakery, located in Yonkers, registered in 2012 to be the first certified B Corporation in New York. Founded in 1982 by Bernard Glassman, a former aerospace engineer-turned zen Buddhist, the bakery started as a livelihood for his zen meditation group. But, far from being simply a "mom and pop local bakery," Greyston has grown into "truly a magnificent manufacturing plant that provides people with jobs and opportunities, and not only that, has this nonprofit component which addresses affordable housing, community gardens, childcare, and HIV health care, so it's an incredible hybrid organization that we encourage you to learn more about," said Ariel Hauptman, Business Development Manager for Greyston.

In 1988, Greyston Bakery developed a relationship with [Ben & Jerry's](#) and has been the sole brownie provider for their ice cream ever since, making, Hauptman estimates, 30,000 - 40,000 lbs. of brownies for the ice cream giant per day. As we learned last spring, Ben & Jerry's is [fiercely loyal to its suppliers](#), working to enrich and grow those relationships whenever possible, so their business and support has been a huge driver in helping Greyston Bakery become such a sustainable community benefactor.

GME installed 36 solar panels on the roof of the bakery (to commemorate it, Greyston handed out 36 brownies to the first 36 people at the session. And they were good.) Afterward, Greyston saw their brownies as being partially [baked by the sun](#), as their utility bills were offset by solar.

Whole Planet Foundation

Whole Planet Foundation (WPF), established by Whole Foods Market, aims to alleviate poverty "through microcredit in communities worldwide that supply Whole Foods Market stores with products. We provide grants to microfinance institutions in Latin America, Africa and Asia who in turn develop and offer microenterprise loan programs, training and other financial services to the self-employed poor." (from the website) Whole Foods embarked on this endeavor with the help of microfinance expert, Muhammad Yunus.

What do brownies have to do with microfinance? Although Greyston had tried in the past to market their own brownies, the effort did not pay off so it was eventually discontinued. Ben & Jerry's Vermont neighbor, Seventh Generation, is a large donor to the Whole Planet Foundation. The former CEO at Greyston's met Whole Planet through Seventh Generation and "just loved the mission," Hauptman said. Although they wanted to work together, it took until 2012

before the opportunity presented itself and Greyston's was ready to get back into retail with a savvy B2C organization, tell their story and do (more) good.

Finally, they arrived at a solution: Greyston would place their brownies in Whole Food Markets, and donate 2% of their profits (from \$2-\$2.50 per brownie) to Whole Planet to help their microfinance efforts around the world. Whole Planet is alleviating poverty in 57 countries and impacting 1.79 million people, "giving them a chance for a better life through entrepreneurship," Joy Stoddard, Development and Outreach Director, Whole Foods/Whole Planet Foundation, said.

"We are the fortunate recipient of Greyston's generosity from this amazing brownie, ... [however] our partnership wasn't easy to form, it didn't make sense to anybody and initially there was no formula..." Stoddard said, and to date, at 4-5 cents per brownie, Greyston has donated over \$10,000 to Whole Planet. When the average loan in a developing country is \$182, that kind of money can make a big impact, since it is loaned and repaid, loaned again and repaid, again and again, expanding its reach into perpetuity.

Brownies = jobs

Due to its new partnership with Whole Planet, along with its longstanding contract with Ben & Jerry's, Greyston was able to staff two complete production lines, one for Ben & Jerry's and one for Whole Planet, and able to hire more locals in desperate need of employment. Greyston believes in "open hiring" and will give anyone over the age of 18 a job, regardless of education level, past incarceration or skill set.

Hauptman said there was currently about a three-month waiting list, but Greyston doggedly calls everyone on the list when their name comes up. Then, they are given a position, training and a six-month probation

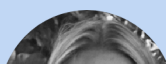
period, after which they are hired on permanently. If they can do the job and do it well, nothing else matters. Hauptman estimates that about 30 percent of new workers don't make it through the probation period. However, despite the enormous amount of training and investment Greyston puts into each employee, Hauptman is sure that all companies should embrace open hiring, because job skills are among the most important to have. She knows it's hard, but, "We're here for 31 years and it works."

Just as Green Mountain Energy Sun Club solar installations are made possible by donations from customers and employees, Stoddard said, Whole Foods/Whole Planet customers and employees are completely on board with donating to Whole Planet to further their anti-poverty efforts. To date, \$21 million has gone to Whole Planet from customers rounding up their bills, \$5 million from employees donating out of their paychecks and another \$5 million from suppliers.

From solar energy to brownies to entrepreneurs in developing countries, these business relationships have had an impact around the globe, lifting up communities and creating jobs and futures.

[[image credit: Terri Oda, Flickr cc](#)]

Andrea Newell has more than ten years of experience designing, developing and writing ERP e-learning materials for large corporations in several industries. She was a consultant for PricewaterhouseCoopers and a contract consultant for companies like IBM, BP, Marathon Oil, Pfizer, and Steelcase, among others. She is a writer and former editor at TriplePundit and a





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