

Investing in Child Care: **CORPORATE DONATIONS**

Black Hills Energy

Corporate foundations provide an opportunity for companies to advance their philanthropic goals by supporting programs that reflect their strengths and values.

Black Hills Energy strives to positively impact the Nebraska communities it serves by supporting early child care and education initiatives.

Key Points

- ▶ Black Hills Energy has contributed approximately \$241,500 to support programs that promote the early education and healthy development of young children throughout Nebraska.
- ▶ Black Hill Energy's donations directly benefit children and families in Gothenburg, Albion, Wood River and Red Cloud.
- ▶ Corporate foundations allow companies like Black Hills build strategic, flexible charitable giving plans that reflect their strengths and values.



Black Hills Energy's corporate giving helped create child care capacity in Red Cloud with its support of The Valley Child Development Center (above).

Black Hills Energy serves about 1.3 million customers through natural gas and electric utilities across 8 states: Arkansas, Colorado, Iowa, Kansas, Montana, Nebraska, South Dakota and Wyoming. When the company began operating in Nebraska, it brought a vision of strengthening local communities through charitable giving. Black Hills Energy established its corporate foundation 20 years ago in 2001. Since its inception, the foundation has granted more than \$7.1 million to almost 500 organizations.

Black Hills Energy is committed to improving the quality of life for the 824 communities it serves. It has established giving priorities that help strengthen communities, aid families, support education and workforce initiatives and protect the environment. In the Nebraska communities where Black Hills operates, its giving priorities include early childhood programs, nutrition services, libraries, playgrounds and other education and child development initiatives.



FirstFiveNebraska.org





Black Hills Energy provides natural gas and electric utilities to 1.3 million customers in eight states: Arkansas, Colorado, Iowa, Kansas, Montana, Nebraska, South Dakota and Wyoming. Learn more at blackhillsenergy.com.

While many companies have corporate giving programs, Black Hills Energy's is unique for Nebraska, said Melissa Garcia, senior community affairs manager.

"Becoming a community partner is not typically something a gas company has done in Nebraska," Garcia said. "When we acquired the business in 2016 we took our model of community engagement and spread it across the state to our 319 communities."

Strategic giving to support communities

In 2021, Black Hills Energy's charitable giving in Nebraska totaled more than \$632,000, including gifts from its corporate foundation, state utility budget, United Way giving and energy assistance support.

Black Hills Energy's foundation has donated approximately \$90,000 to support child care programs in Nebraska. They have provided capital donations for Impact Center in Gothenburg, Boone Beginnings in Albion, Stick Creek Kids in Wood River and The Valley Childhood Development Center in Red Cloud.

"One area of investment our foundation really likes to support is bricks-and-mortar, capital investment projects," said Garcia. "Typically, it's hard to find dollars to get these projects over the finish line."

Prior to joining Black Hills Energy, Garcia led the Custer Economic Development Corporation in Broken Bow. She understands the impact high-quality early childhood care and education programs have on helping communities grow and thrive.

"Being part of the economic and community development conversations across the state and being business owners ourselves, my husband and I know how critical it is for workforce and for the future of our communities to have access to educational child care."

Beyond Black Hills Energy's support for early childhood programs, the company funds initiatives that encourage healthy, active children. These include \$40,000 in support of ADA all-accessible playgrounds in Holdrege, York and Sidney; \$42,500 for playgrounds in Sutton, Alliance, Johnson Lake and Imperial; and \$45,000 for youth library expansions in Ravenna, Ogallala and Rock County. Black Hills also contributed \$24,000 to fund a Lexington YMCA program aimed at feeding kids who do not have a place to go after school.

Benefits of corporate foundations

Bringing corporate giving programs under a charitable foundation has strategic benefits for companies like Black Hills Energy. It enables businesses to stretch the impact of their charitable giving by contributing more during higher profit years or reducing contributions if necessary, providing consistent support for their philanthropic efforts. Other benefits of a charitable foundation can include increased visibility and reduced administrative costs associated with grantmaking and fund management.

Black Hills Energy strives to make its grantmaking process easy and accessible through an online application. Organizations that are selected to move forward receive a letter of support and are then voted on quarterly by the Black Hills Foundation's board of directors, comprised of representatives from each of its eight-state regions.

"We've been diligent about doing projects in Nebraska every quarter to support quality of life and growth in our communities," Garcia said.

Learn more about how your organization can impact child care in your community at FirstFiveNebraska.org. For more information about Black Hills Energy's charitable support, visit blackhillsenergy.com.



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