

A History of Purpose

An Interview with John Ellington,
Director, Finance and Grants Administration,
The Home Depot Foundation

EDITORS' NOTE John Ellington is responsible for establishing and managing the collaborative strategies to implement The Home Depot Foundation's focus of working to improve the homes and lives of U.S. military veterans and their families. Ellington joined The Home Depot in 2005 in the Assurance and Advisory Management Program, a two-year program designed to develop the future leaders of the company. Since that time, he has held roles of increasing responsibility across the company's corporate finance landscape in the functional areas of financial planning and analysis, store operations, merchandising services and online merchandising. Prior to joining The Home Depot, Ellington spent four years at Ernst & Young in a variety of roles in its Atlanta office. A native of the Acadiana region of southern Louisiana, Ellington graduated magna cum laude with a B.S. in accounting and minor in economics from Oglethorpe University in Atlanta. He proudly serves the Foundation in honor of his late father, a veteran of the Vietnam War.



John Ellington

FOUNDATION BRIEF The Home Depot Foundation (corporate.homedepot.com/foundation), a registered 501(c)(3) public charity, works to improve housing issues facing U.S. veterans, train skilled tradespeople to fill the labor gap, and support communities impacted by natural disasters. Since 2011, the Foundation has invested more than \$335 million in veteran causes and improved more than 47,000 veteran homes and facilities.

Will you provide an overview of The Home Depot Foundation and its main areas of focus?

The Home Depot Foundation was formally incorporated in 2002, but throughout the history of the company our key advantage has been the corporate values that our founders instilled in the company more than 40 years ago. We have been doing philanthropic work as an organization since the inception of the business. Over the past six or seven years, we've dramatically increased the size of the Foundation and the impact it has on our communities.

When you look at what we're doing on a national basis, it is different from many



Team Depot, The Home Depot's associate volunteer force, donates time and labor to service projects across the country

corporate foundations. Historically, we've had a specific mission as philanthropists to support veteran housing needs. We began with a focus on impacting veteran homelessness and expanded to providing adaptive smart homes for combat-wounded soldiers

and critical home repairs for low-income and senior veterans. Our men and women returning home with catastrophic injuries need homes that can support their new lives, so we began investing in nonprofits that could answer that need as well as partners to help veterans who are struggling financially or on a fixed income maintain their home in an affordable way.

We have also recently invested in helping to reinvigorate the skilled trades. We are starting this effort with veterans who are separating from the military and coming back into civilian life and training them in the trade skills necessary to have a new career in this desperately needed space. We also started working with high schools to reintroduce skilled trades back into the curriculum and further develop the pipeline for the construction trades.

How closely is the work of the Foundation integrated into Home Depot?

It is very closely integrated. We look at our philanthropy through multiple lenses. One is clearly investing in nonprofit organizations through the Foundation, however we are also helping to mobilize our volunteers across the country.

Issues around veteran housing and affordable housing are close to our business. More than 10 percent of our associates are veterans so that message really resonates.

We also focus on disaster relief. We've always been there to help respond to disasters in our communities through volunteerism as well as through investing real dollars through our Foundation in nonprofits that make an impact in the disaster recovery space. This also clearly resonates with our people.

Our volunteer force is called Team Depot and it is really engaged across the business in multiple aspects.

How important is it to have metrics to track the impact of the Foundation's efforts?

Metrics are important. When it comes to philanthropy, there are specific outcomes that you establish with your nonprofit partners, whether it's how many critical home repairs we are attempting to accomplish, what the home repairs look like, who we are impacting, or what the demographics are of the people we are impacting. Each of these helps steer the outcomes for the nonprofit organizations.

What differentiates us a bit from corporate foundations and maybe makes us a bit more like a private foundation is our level of engagement and our expectations of the nonprofit partners we support. There are many whom, when disaster hits, write a check to Organization X and consider that to constitute their philanthropy. That's not what we do. Our approach is to be great business partners with our nonprofit organizations by understanding their missions and how they can impact the social issues that we are interested in impacting, then help them do just that with whatever resources we can provide.

How critical has it been to the Foundation's success to have such a deep engagement and commitment from Home Depot's senior leadership team for these efforts?

It's the single most important element of what we do and there's not even a close second. C-Suite engagement is what drives this whole thing. It's what makes it all work, because deep down, everyone wants to be out volunteering, and giving back makes them feel much more fulfilled, but allowing this to happen needs to be embedded in the culture. It can't just be lip service.

When you see your leaders doing those same activities and volunteering right alongside you, it communicates this is important and we need to show up for it. We have had generations of leaders in this business who valued volunteerism.

When the C-Suite buys into what philanthropy looks like from a giving standpoint, it is empowering. ●