

Toyota's Business Partnering Group TERRA Pushes Toyota's Environmental Goals Forward

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When Kimberly Kirkpatrick founded the TERRA business partnering group (BPG) that focuses on environmental activities, in 2011, she had no clue that it would eventually lead to her current position as an audit and remediation manager for Environmental Hazmat, Safety, Privacy, Cyber and Mobility (EHSPCM) at Toyota Motor North America (Toyota).

Kirkpatrick, who is also the co-chair of TERRA, has always had a deep appreciation for the world around her and has been steadfast in conserving it through environmentally friendly efforts.

That's why, after participating in a short-term recycling initiative called Green Champions at the company's former headquarters in Torrance, California, Kirkpatrick joined other like-minded individuals who had participated in that program to form TERRA. The BPG was created to allow employees with a passion for the environment to express their interest by participating in community activities that support sustainability and foster leadership development.

Before TERRA, most of Toyota's BPGs were focused on supporting protected classes such as ethnicity, gender, and not necessarily different interests, Kirkpatrick says.

"We were one of the first BPGs, along with ToyoPets, to start based on members' interests," she adds.

Rooted in Passion and Community

Celebrating its milestone 10th anniversary last year, TERRA has grown to five chapters with more than 700 members across its branches. TERRA has given members the opportunity to develop skills outside of their jobs and give back in areas they're passionate about, while also helping the company solve business challenges.

"What team members can expect depends on their own personal drive and level of how they want to be engaged," says Matthew Sheldon, communications manager for Social Innovation at Toyota and chair of TERRA. "They can receive information and attend events, help organize events or become a leader. It's really up to each person and the level of involvement they would like to commit as a member."



Becky Martin, manager of Environmental & Sustainability at Toyota and engagement lead for TERRA, who joined the company five years ago says TERRA members – herself included – are passionate and want to do as much as they can to drive environmental awareness.

“It is important for me to be a part of this BPG because I want to help provide Toyota team members with educational and volunteer opportunities related to the environment,” she says. “I became involved with TERRA when I joined the company because I’m very passionate about environmental issues, and TERRA speaks to me the most out of all of the BPGs.”

Planting the Seeds for Growth and Opportunity

BPGs like TERRA not only give members a platform to share ideas and work toward common goals, but they also provide leadership and networking opportunities. For Kirkpatrick, being a TERRA member was integral to her growth within the company.

“I was in a training role when we founded TERRA,” she says. “Because of TERRA, I was able to connect with people who worked in the environmental, hazmat and safety group, and through those connections, I became aware of a job opening and applied and got the job. This group is the reason why I’m in a role right now that deals with environmental issues. It is because of TERRA that I ended up in a day job related to the things that I love.”

Pivoting During the Pandemic

Like many groups and organizations, TERRA made adjustments to continue to operate during the pandemic. Since so many of the group’s activities relied on in-person volunteer efforts, they had to pivot and take programs virtually to continue making an impact.

Thankfully, Sheldon and the rest of the leaders were up for the challenge. They found enriching ways to keep the team committed to their mission despite being apart.

“From a virtual programming standpoint, we did a couple of things I’m particularly proud of,” Sheldon says. “One of them being our series on electrification. With Toyota’s expanded approach toward electrification in pursuit of reaching carbon neutrality, we put together a couple of ‘lunch and learns’ and a virtual field trip to help team members across Toyota, no matter what their role is, to be able to speak about Toyota’s commitment.”

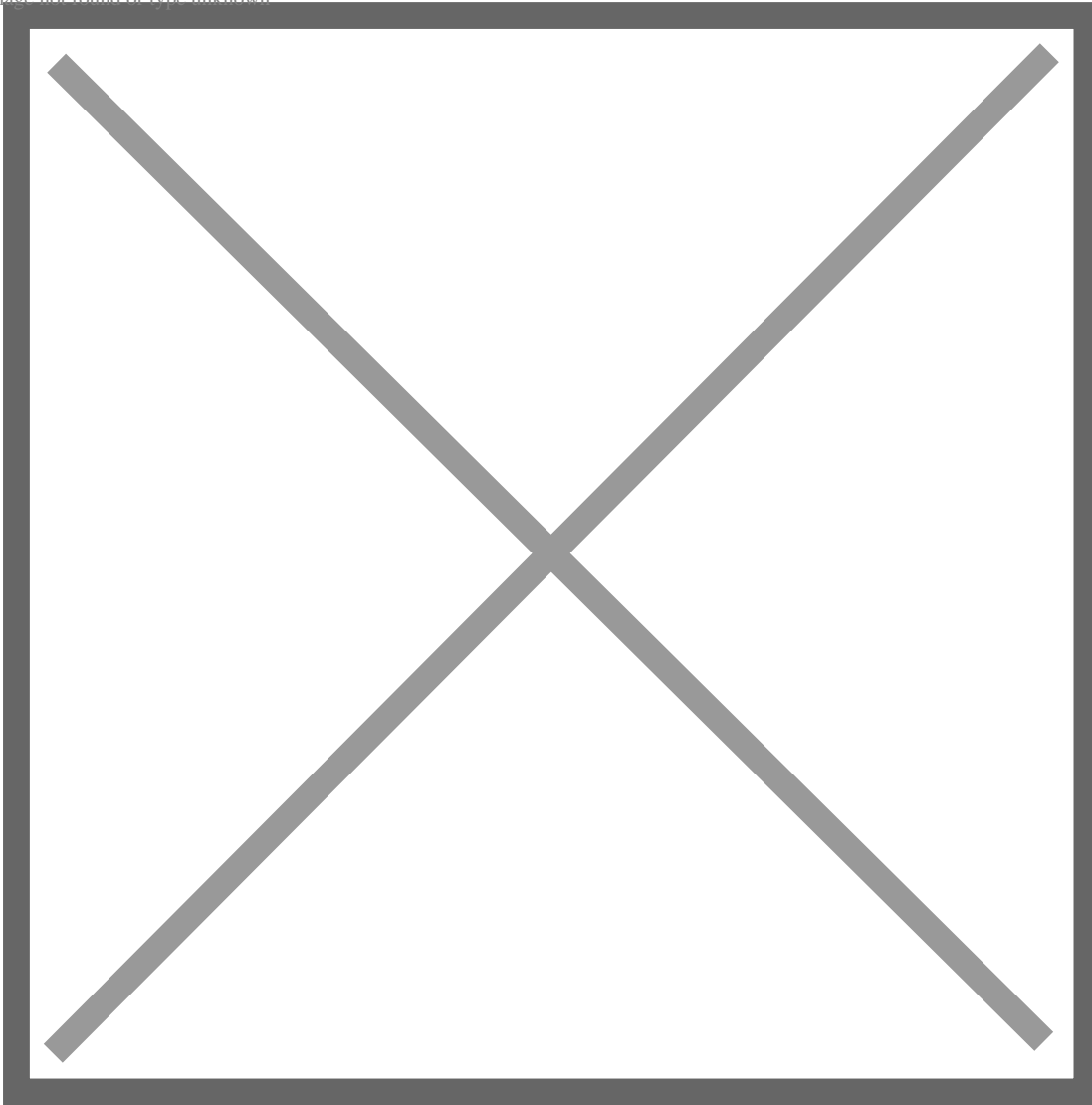
For Martin, one notable activity was a cooking demo she helped plan.

“I organized a webinar with Bonton Farms, a local urban farm in an underserved community, and Sodexo, Toyota’s on-site food services,” she says. “Bonton Farms shared information about their history and mission, and the head Sodexo chef at Toyota’s headquarters performed a cooking demo with produce from the farm. Bonton Farms also sold their produce boxes to several TERRA team members. TERRA members were able to learn that eating locally sourced food is more sustainable and has a lower carbon footprint.”

Virtual activities like these helped TERRA members stay engaged while learning about the company’s latest environmental innovations, as well as educating team members about Toyota’s environmental goals and the company’s four focus areas – carbon, water, biodiversity and materials.

“We try to create activities and provide education aligned with those four focus areas, all laddering up to our environmental goals through Challenge 2050,” says Sheldon. “We try to reinforce those goals through our activities while having fun at the same time.”

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The TERRA team is excited to get back to more of their hands-on activities in the months ahead, with several initiatives already in the works.

“We’re anxious to get back to partnering on activities with our nonprofits,” Sheldon adds. “For instance, planting trees with Texas Trees, our annual event for National Public Lands Day, doing cleanups and other activities to help protect and beautify our public lands, as well as our recycling events on campus and other fun activities. I think getting back out there will really help rebuild our community. In-person activities help create a more inclusive environment and a good culture.”

Driving Sustainability Forward

Cultivating and fostering an environment where people, cars and nature can coexist harmoniously is a Toyota hallmark. And TERRA is a natural fit for a company that is a trailblazer in the electrified vehicle space.

“TERRA having a presence at Toyota is important because the more people we can get involved, the more employees have that mindset instilled to be more environmentally focused,” says Allison Mahood, a material quality engineer in Chemicals at Toyota and TERRA communications chair. “I believe if we are active in

helping to create a better environment, it can reflect in the products we are producing. It is really important to provide our consumer with that aspect as well.”

Preserving the earth is paramount for TERRA members, and they want people to know that everyone can do their part in its conservation.

“Start doing your own research and raise awareness with the people around you,” Mahood says of ways people can make a difference. “One of TERRA’s initiatives, especially during the pandemic, is to raise awareness because our members individually feel a responsibility. When you have a collective who are like-minded, great things can happen.”