

# 3 KEYS TO BUILDING STRONG PARTNERSHIPS: NONPROFITS & EMPLOYEE FOUNDATIONS

Surge for Water & ERM Foundation

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Philanthropy and the business of “doing good” is a large industry – greater than \$450 billion dollars. Given this reality, identifying and navigating meaningful relationships between nonprofit organizations and funders can be both rewarding and challenging.

Since 2017, Surge for Water and the ERM Foundation embarked on a multi-year partnership impacting 27,000 lives across nine Primary Schools, a Health Center and their surrounding communities in Kaberamaido & Kalaki in Uganda.

They have found in each other – the right partner! While building strong relationships is complex, the organizations have identified 3 key attributes that significantly helped strengthen their partnership along the way.

1. Shared Vision
2. Adaptability
3. Meaningful Engagement

**“Finding the sweet spot between the organization and the funder is key.... We’re a modest-size funder, so we need partners where our grants can make a significant impact. Surge confirmed that it does work and it can work for multiple years.”**

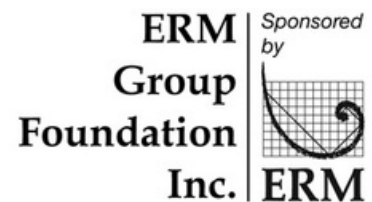
Janice Taplar, US Manager, ERM Foundation



Surge for Water is a Chicago-based 501c3 non-profit, that invests in communities with safe water, sanitation, hygiene and menstrual health solutions.



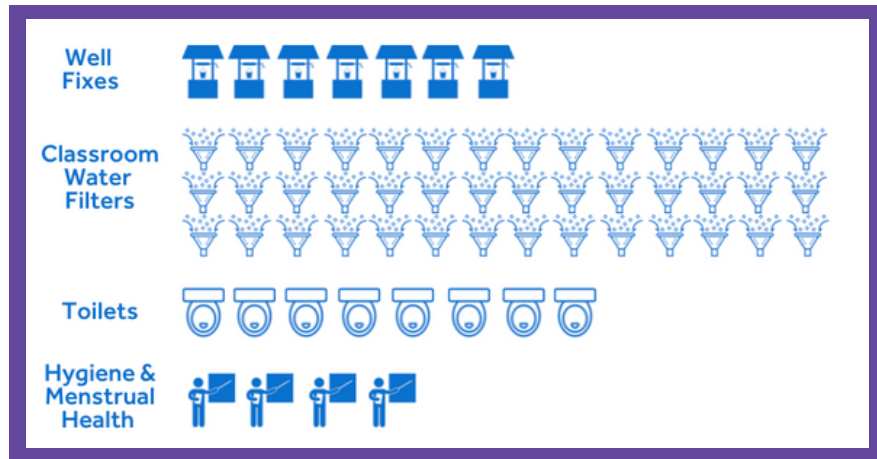
ERM Foundation (an Employee Foundation) was established in 1995 to enable ERM and its employees to provide technical, fundraising and volunteer support for non-profit organizations and social enterprises that share their commitment to creating a more sustainable and equitable world.



# PAST, PRESENT, FUTURE

## Past Success

Since 2017, Surge for Water and ERM Foundation have impacted more than 27,000 people in Uganda and Haiti through 7 well fixes, 42 classroom filters, 8 toilets and Hygiene & Menstrual Health training for Alem, Achilo-Corner, Amukurat, Abirabira, Kalaki Secondary, Apapai Otuboi, Murem, Okapel, Ocelakur Schools, and Alwa Health Center.



## 1 Shared Vision

Both Surge and ERM Foundation have a shared vision to create a more sustainable and equitable world. They both work to implement programs that have a clear impact. The 27,000 lives impacted in Uganda via sustainable water, sanitation, hygiene and menstrual health solutions – is a testament to this vision.

The ERM Foundation's philanthropy goals include protecting the natural environment, reducing carbon emissions, improving access to clean water and sanitation and investing in women's livelihoods in the green economy – connected to the United Nations 17 Sustainable Development Goals. It seeks nonprofit partners, like Surge, that align with one or more of these target goals. While Surge's main focus is water and sanitation, their delivery model is women-centered and they consider the natural environment a key stakeholder in all programs. This programmatic approach aligns perfectly with ERM's focus areas.

The joint success in the delivery of these goals has helped strengthen Surge's credibility in the industry and among Ugandan community members.

**"ERM has core values and Surge matches those values"**  
Maya Zein, Senior Consultant,ERM

# KEYS TO A STRONG PARTNERSHIP



## THE 3 KEYS

1. Shared Vision
2. Adaptability
3. Meaningful Engagement

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### Adaptability

ERM Foundation, with ERM Corporation and staff support, represents the type of funder open to continuous adaptation to international trends and its partner needs. ERM Foundation's response to the COVID-19 pandemic is an example of this adaptability.

**“The COVID-19 recovery fund, ‘Standing Together’, has provided funding and pro bono professional support for our nonprofit partners – and also funded research-led collaborations to help mitigate the impacts of the pandemic and contribute to global thought leadership”**

Shona King, Global Manager, ERM Foundation

Through the pandemic, ERM Foundation offered unrestricted funding opportunities to its grantees. This was especially true for organizations they had long-term relationships with – allowing the Foundation to “Stand Together” with communities in which they have an existing impact. Surge was one direct beneficiary of this change. This support helped Surge fund key field staff in Uganda and Haiti, continuing critical services to communities in need when it mattered the most.

ERM Foundation's adaptability and commitment to marginalized communities also shone through as they pivoted to a simplified application and reporting process, as well as the expansion of their Foundation target areas to include more immediate needs. Nonprofit organizations at Surge's size, often lack the resources needed to complete complex application and reporting requirements – leaving them out of much needed funding opportunities. This exemplary move by ERM Foundation helps grassroots organizations like Surge get the support needed for their invaluable work.

Even pre-pandemic, the Foundation has always been very understanding and open to program changes, mid grant cycle – always trusting Surge's expertise and advice. By being open and adaptable, they've allowed Surge to effectively respond to the greatest needs. By listening and putting the community's needs first – the foundation has continued to strengthen Surge's credibility and ensure the delivery of truly sustainable and equitable programs.



# KEYS TO A STRONG PARTNERSHIP

**“The right partner not only exists at the organizational level but between individuals. It’s been such a joy working hand-in-hand with ERM staff over the past 4 years”**

Shilpa Alva, Founder & Executive Director, Surge for Water

## 3 Meaningful Engagement

ERM staff’s expertise has been a material contributor to Surge’s global success – across all field countries and programs. Some examples include the delivery of Surge’s

- Water: The Global Passport, a game-based program for schools in the US to educate on the global water crisis and encourage local action
- Break the Barriers menstrual health program to empower and educate women of all ages globally
- Environmental Education, designed in partnership with ERM staff, to promote conscious and proactive protection of natural resources (i.e. water and soil) and inform a community’s contribution towards caring for their watershed

**27,000+**

people impacted  
directly since 2017



For the ERM Foundation, coupling volunteer and pro-bono hours with financial resources and a focus on smaller grassroots organizations was the blend that led to stronger, long-term relationships and greater impact. It’s the journey that led to this relationship with Surge.

For ERM Staff, however, it’s not just about sharing their expertise, it’s about the impact. Employees enjoy hearing stories of impact from ERM Foundation’s funded programs.

**“Partnering with Surge has brought into perspective what other people are experiencing in the same world that I live in and it’s really impacted my daily life.”**

Stephanie Wink, Consultant II, ERM

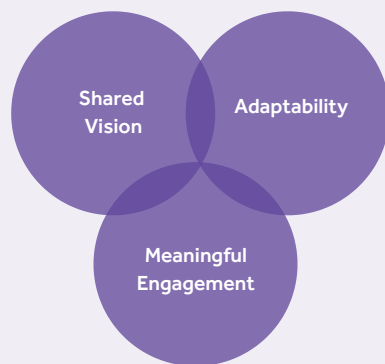
In addition, ERM employees regularly share that the Foundation is one of the main reasons that they joined ERM. ERM employee Maya Zein, Senior Consultant shared that new hires regularly ping her to discuss the Foundation. “It’s one of the cool things about ERM - that you can sponsor an organization’s work, do pro-bono work, and see some amazing impact from all over the world.”

# CREATING LASTING IMPACT FOR GENERATIONS TO COME

**“Now that the school well is fully functional, education has come to the children of Kotin village. Before, we spent hours every day fetching water. Many of us missed out on an education which could shape our future. Many girls dropped out of school due to lack of water. All that is now history. We shall now carry the face of clean water wherever we go through good hygiene, sanitation, and full school attendance.”**

Martha, Lucy, and Jessica, students at Ocelakur Primary School, Uganda

## Successful Partnerships The 3 Keys



## The Future

Surge and ERM Foundation will continue to address project areas together. ERM Foundation will continue to encourage Surge to 'dream big' in the scaling of its programs and offer technical expertise for programmatic and organizational growth.

At some point, however, it's understood that the definition of the right partner for each organization will continue to adapt. In the words of ERM Foundation, US Manager, Janice Taplar, "We want to give you [Surge/our partners] what you need. Our goal is that one day Surge will outgrow our funding model because that would mean we did something really well -- We enabled you to progress to that next level."



To learn more about Surge's work, please contact: [friends@surgeforwater.org](mailto:friends@surgeforwater.org) or visit Surge's website at [surgeforwater.org](http://surgeforwater.org). Follow us on social channels @surgeforwater.

To learn more about ERM Foundations work, please visit [www.erm.com/foundation](http://www.erm.com/foundation).