

Securing Sponsorship

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If your organization wants to set up a project or improve facilities, sponsorship can provide a vital source of funding. To secure sponsorship you need to understand what sponsors are looking for and offer benefits and value that meet their needs. Sponsorship is a business relationship that does not end when you receive the money—you need to work hard to ensure that sponsors obtain the benefits they sought.

What You Need to Know

Do sponsorship arrangements have to be exclusive?

Some sponsors may prefer an exclusive arrangement, but there is nothing to prevent you from having multiple sponsors. If you do work with more than one sponsor, it may be preferable to have tiered levels of sponsorship with different benefits for different contributions.

Is business the only source of sponsorship?

Depending on the nature of your organization and the type of project you are seeking to fund, you may also be able to attract funding from individuals or charitable organizations.

What to Do

Clarify Why You Need Sponsorship

Sponsorship can take many different forms, so it is important to analyze what type of benefits your organization wants from a sponsorship arrangement. These are some of the more common forms of sponsorship or support.

- Funding provides you with money that you can spend to meet your organization's most pressing needs. It is the most flexible form of sponsorship.
- Development funding provides money that has a specific purpose such as improving facilities or developing skills.
- Discounted or free goods or services—this type of sponsorship can help you reduce your running costs. It is not as flexible as funding that allows you to choose how to spend the money.

- Donations provide you with money for any suitable purpose. Donations offer flexibility, but, in most cases, the donor does not require anything in return.
- Corporate membership is a means of raising funds by offering businesses certain privileged services or facilities in return for a fee. This is not strictly sponsorship, but is another form of fundraising that can supplement other sponsorship arrangements.

Understand Sponsors' Needs

Sponsors do not provide funds because they feel benevolent. They have a number of marketing and corporate objectives that sponsorship can help them to meet. When you are seeking sponsorship for your organization, it is important to understand the drivers which include:

- selling more product by increasing the visibility of their brand;
- raising their profile by association with your organization;
- improving their corporate image by involvement in appropriate activities;
- meeting corporate responsibilities by supporting good causes;
- increasing sales opportunities by using sponsorship events as a sales outlet;
- achieving product endorsement through association with a successful organization;
- hospitality opportunities by inviting clients to high profile events run your organization;
- improving employee relations through hospitality or association with a high-profile organization;
- improving media coverage.

Assess Your Value to Sponsors

Before you approach prospective sponsors, you should look closely at your own organization to identify the potential benefits for a sponsor. Key factors could include:

- your track record;
- your reputation for excellence;
- the strength of your identity;
- your community involvement;
- the profile of your target audience or market;
- the facilities you could offer the sponsor;
- comarketing opportunities.

Identify a Suitable Sponsor

Sponsorship can come from a number of sources, including businesses, individuals, and charitable trusts. If you are looking for corporate sponsors, draw up a short list of businesses with characteristics such as:

- companies that have a connection with your organization;
- local businesses that could benefit from an association with your organization;
- businesses that have recently moved to the area and want to raise their local profile;
- national companies who sponsor local organizations or events.

Your preliminary approach should be based on an introductory letter and a sponsorship proposal that is tailored to each prospect. The letter should be addressed to a named individual and should seek to secure an appointment for more detailed discussions.

Prepare a Proposal

The sponsorship proposal should be informative and should set out precisely what you require and what you are offering the sponsor. As a guideline, the proposal should be roughly four pages long and should provide details of your organization, as well as details of sponsorship opportunities. The information should include:

Your organization

- number of people, main activities, location
- your target audience profile
- achievements and successes
- previous sponsors
- endorsements
- press coverage
- other funding sources

Purpose of sponsorship

- your goals and objectives
- use of sponsorship funds
- time frame for the project
- key benefits of the project
- financial projections

Benefits to the sponsor

Specific benefits tailored to the individual prospect, including:

- access to your target audience;
- association with your organization and reputation;
- community links.

Operation of sponsorship

This section should explain what the sponsor will receive in terms of coverage and facilities, such as:

- exclusive sponsorship or shared facilities;
- identification and acknowledgement of the sponsor by name and logo;
- acknowledgement on promotional material and other documentation;
- planned media coverage, including sponsorship announcement and any special events;
- prominence on your Web Site;
- hospitality facilities such as free tickets and opportunities for client entertainment.

Write a Personalized Cover Letter

The cover letter should be personalized to each prospective sponsor and should highlight the reason for the approach. It should highlight the potential synergy between you and the sponsor and demonstrate that you understand the sponsor's business needs. You should conclude the letter by saying that you will be in touch shortly to arrange a meeting. If you want the prospect to respond, offer alternatives such as a telephone number or e-mail address to make it easy to reply.

Follow Up the Proposal

If you stated that you would contact the prospect, make sure you do so within the time frame you indicated. If you are successful, arrange a meeting to discuss the sponsorship in more detail. If the prospect turns you down, you should try to find out why your bid was not successful, so that you can fine-tune any future proposals.

Announce the Successful Sponsorship

Once you have secured a sponsor, announce the fact in the press to get the first level of coverage. If you are planning an official launch, invite journalists and reporters to the event. You should send your

release to your own local newspapers, radio, and television stations, as well as any media that are relevant to your sponsor's business. You should also announce the arrangement on your Web Site and contact any other interested parties by e-mail or mail.

Help to Raise Your Sponsor's Profile

Sponsorship, like any other marketing medium, should be measured. The sponsor will be looking for a good return on investment. Although it might be hard to track tangible benefits, such as increased sales, the metrics are more likely to focus on intangibles such as levels of press coverage, changes in attitude or awareness levels among key target groups.

You can help your sponsor achieve success by promoting its involvement whenever possible. As well as using your sponsor's name and logo on any relevant communications material, you may be able to plan special events featuring your sponsor's products or services.

Encourage Networking

If you have arrangements with a number of sponsors who have mutual interests, you can create further benefit by enabling the different parties to network. You can do this by arranging informal meetings or inviting all parties to any sponsorship-related events.

Provide Feedback to Your Sponsor

Good sponsorship arrangements are based on effective long-term relationships. You can strengthen the relationship by providing feedback on the results of the sponsorship. This might include:

- copies of press releases and press cuttings featuring the sponsor;
- reports on the number of visits to Web Site;
- progress reports on the sponsored project;
- details of upcoming events.

As part of the feedback process, you should arrange regular review meetings with your sponsor to ensure that the arrangement continues to benefit both parties.

- Is the sponsorship package enabling you to meet your objectives?
- Do the arrangements impose any restrictions that are detrimental to your organization?
- Has there been any adverse reaction to the arrangements?

- Is the sponsor satisfied with the level of coverage?
- Is the sponsor meeting its objectives?

What to Avoid

You Put Together a Poor Proposal

Sponsorship is a business arrangement. Therefore, it is essential to put together a professional proposal that provides potential sponsors with all the information they need to make a decision. The proposal should demonstrate an understanding of the sponsor's business and needs, and the content should be tailored to individual prospects.

You Target the Wrong Prospects

The best sponsorship deals provide a close match between the sponsor and the sponsored organization. The match could be based on a common target audience, shared values, or other factors. Preliminary research should concentrate on identifying prospective sponsors who offer the greatest potential for a match. If you do choose the wrong sponsor, the arrangement may not produce benefits for either party.

Where to Learn More

Book:

Grey, Anne-Marie, and Kim Skildum-Reid, *The Sponsorship Seeker's Toolkit*, 2nd ed. McGraw-Hill Book Company, 2002.

Web Site:

Sponsorship Secrets: www.sponsorshipsecrets.com