

## **Engaging with the Private Sector**

A simple step-by-step tool to assist the Community, Voluntary, Charitable & Education Sectors when approaching the Business Sector for support.

### **Useful Tips on How to Plan and Make an Approach for Business Support**

<b>Self – Analysis</b>	
<b>Please Do...</b>	<b>Please Don't...</b>
Examine your organisation and internal operations and identify the areas where a partnership could help you most. Formulate a strategy re: what you want to achieve	Don't dive in with an approach before assessing your strengths and opportunities and without having a clear idea of what you want to achieve
Prioritise your most pressing needs – financial, business expertise, in-kind support or employee volunteer support?	Don't think just in terms of a financial donation - other forms of support may be more beneficial in the longer term
<b>Prepare your Case</b>	
<b>Please Do...</b>	<b>Please Don't...</b>
Explain the scope of your organisation – set out your aims, objectives, vision and the people you benefit	Don't assume your target business will understand the way you operate and what you do.
Describe your plans and aspirations in the context of a social issue that needs to be addressed within the local community	Don't imply that your organisation needs help for its own sake, but rather for those it serves
Provide statistics and individual success stories that paint the picture	Don't forget that businesses receive several similar requests
Highlight unique features that differentiate your organisation	Don't assume that a potential business partner will understand your sector
Identify key businesses to approach first (those that can contribute value not just cash) Remember that a business can offer in-kind support, mentoring, staff volunteering time as well as financial support.	Don't just ask for cash. Understand that a business will rarely write a blank cheque.

Identify what you would do with the support	Don't expect support without a clear explanation of business & community benefits
Start small - a successful partnership often starts small and grows over time	Don't expect a business to be involved in every group, committee and programme at the outset.
Show how it will make a difference	Don't forget that your business partner will want to promote the positive impact of their contribution
Be flexible and creative about how they might be able to help you	Don't stick rigidly to pre-conceptions – they can often be wrong
List your existing and other potential funders / partners (public, private & voluntary sectors)	Don't expect a business to support you without knowing who else you are involved with. They may be competitors
Point out the staff development opportunities	Don't underestimate the benefits to both parties
Use language that businesses will understand. If you want to communicate effectively, use language that a business will understand.	Don't use academic / educational speak & don't hesitate to ask business people to clarify terminology that they use
<b>Plan your approach in advance</b>	
<b>Please Do...</b>	<b>Please Don't...</b>
Find out all you can about the business before making an approach	Don't make out of date presumptions. A business may have changed its focus, moved or merged.
Check whether the business has a community policy. If they do, familiarise yourself with it and position your objectives to meet theirs.	Don't waste time pursuing unlikely candidates. If there is no obvious match, move on to someone else.
<b>Making the approach</b>	
<b>Please Do...</b>	<b>Please Don't...</b>
Carefully select the person to make the approach. Do they have a sound understanding of your aims and objectives and can they relate to a potential business partner?	Don't assume same person will be best for every approach

Identify the appropriate person or department to contact - a wrongly addressed approach may end up in the bin.	Large / national companies will have a dedicated person / department for community involvement. Don't bother writing to the MD or Chairman. It may however be appropriate to contact him / her in a smaller business.
Identify the best way to communicate - phone, e-mail, in writing	Don't assume that everyone communicates in the same way
Prepare the ground. Attend networking events. It can often be best to make an approach on the back of a face-to-face meeting.	Don't just talk about what you are after. Spend time listening and find as much as you can about the business and the issues it faces.
Send a written proposal / request with supplementary evidence / info. Explain why they may be interested in your proposal & if possible try and tailor make it to the business	Don't expect an on the spot decision - a partnership may take some time to develop. Don't give the impression that you have sent a round robin begging letter to several companies
Approach with clarity and sell the two-way benefits. Appeal as a solution to their problem, whether it is staff retention or motivation, crime, vandalism, marketing, etc.	Don't expect the flow to be one way - businesses will want a benefit in return
Keep the trail hot - follow up with a phone call and ask for a meeting to discuss further	Don't expect a decision to be made on a letter alone - it may take several meetings before a plan of action can be agreed.
If you have a follow up meeting - Go to them - it will show that you are willing	Don't always expect them to come to you. Businesses are hard pressed and time is precious
If you hold a meeting on your patch... hold it in a suitable environment and provide adequate resources	Don't for example hold a meeting for 5 people in the school hall
<b>During the Relationship... (if successful)</b>	
<i>Please Do...</i>	<i>Please Don't...</i>
Nurture the relationship with your contact within the business - remember they have to prove to their colleagues / management team that it remains worthwhile	Do not duplicate your contact points within the business - you may end up losing the trust & enthusiasm of the person who is promoting your cause

Create opportunities to involve your business partner whenever possible. Keep them involved of developments, challenges and successes, even if they are outside the project they are directly involved with	Don't be afraid of over-burdening your business partner. It's better they have an opportunity to say "no", than feel left out of the decision-making process, or not been given the option to be involved
Invite staff to visit you regularly, so that they become familiar with your work & organisation	Don't ignore the need for all staff to be involved
Consider whether you could jointly apply for community awards	Don't undervalue the power of third-party endorsements
Always try to include them in press / news releases, newsletters, photo opportunities	Businesses are always keen for positive recognition
Plan ahead - a business may commit for a 12-month period only and then reassess their involvement.	Don't leave it too late to look for a new partner if you need to
Show your appreciation regularly for the support they give	Don't take their support for granted
Give regular feedback to the business so they can analyse their role in the partnership	Don't assume that they will automatically pick up on everything that is happening. Keep your contact in the loop
Do what you say you are going to do.	Don't get a business on board and then change your mind as to what you want them to do - it may lead to a loss of trust & frustration
<b>Finally - if your approach is unsuccessful...</b>	
<i>Please Do...</i>	<i>Please Don't...</i>
Thank them for the time spent considering your application	Don't forget that they may get similar requests on a daily basis
Ask if there may be any future opportunities	Don't overlook the possibility that people and policies change
Ask if there are ways they could improve your proposal when approaching other potential partners	Don't be too proud to ask for advice
Ask if they can recommend other businesses where your request might be more successful, and can they help with any introductions	Stay positive - every rejection brings you one step closer to the business who will engage

### **Other points to consider**

- What sort of workforce does the business have – academic, professional, skilled, semi-skilled - and which do you most need?
- How is the business perceived in the local community?
- Does what they do match up with the aims of your organisation
- Would involvement with you send out the messages the business would want
- Do they want to recruit from your community, and if so can you provide the skills they need?
- What could you do with their help that you couldn't do without it?
- How can you help them achieve their goals?
- Could you involve other partners to make your proposition more attractive?
- Does the business have capacity for such a relationship?
- Are you easily accessible?
- How well do you interact with and understand their culture, and do you understand how it differs from your own?