

Simple Steps to Building a Successful Sponsorship Program
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When I took the position of Director of Member Events at the Florida Engineering Society in 2003, I inherited the responsibility of coordinating a middle school math competition, including raising sponsorships to help fund the event. As a seasoned meeting and events coordinator, logistics were my game – but fundraising has never been my strong suit so this was a huge challenge for me. Not to worry, I soon learned that, although challenging, recruiting and retaining sponsors are not rocket science. By incorporating a few simple steps, we can increase our chances of getting to “Yes!” and possibly bring them back for more.

RECRUITMENT

1. Develop the Sponsorship Program – Most of us will take anything anyone is willing to give to help our program, but providing specific sponsorship categories increase our chances of securing sponsors at the minimum level.
2. Create a Sponsorship Kit - Promoting the different sponsorship levels in one information kit allows the potential sponsor an opportunity to see the benefits of sponsorship. It doesn't have to be elaborate – a simple bound booklet or pamphlet is all that's necessary. Someone who is considering supporting your program will want something tangible that they can reference and possibly share with others in their organization that they may need to gain approval from.
3. Identify Potential Sponsors – This may be the hardest part of all – where to start? The old adage “it's all about who you know” certainly fits when it comes to identifying potential sponsors. Your association's board of directors, committee chairs and volunteers may have an established relationship with a potential sponsor and can help open the door (or at least direct you to where the door is).
4. Make Contact – There is nothing I dislike more than cold-calling than perhaps being the recipient of a cold call. More often than not, cold callers are stopped before having the opportunity to get their message across. Why? Cold-callers (think “telemarketers”) are seen as inconsiderate because they are imposing on your time. Everyone is busy and time is valuable. I recommend approaching the potential sponsor by letter or personal e-mail. This communication should detail the program and its goals, state the purpose of the contact (request for sponsorship) and plans for follow-up with a specific timeframe. The sponsorship kit should accompany the letter or e-mail.
5. Follow-Up – It's very important to keep your word and follow-up in the timeframe specified in the correspondence. I like to begin the call by identifying myself and asking if I could take a few moments of their time. Once approved, this is the perfect opportunity to first explain the program (not the sponsorship program) and it's benefits and objectives. After the potential sponsor understands the program concept, he/she will likely be more interested in learning about how they can help support such a noble cause.
6. Continue to Follow-Up – It's highly unlikely that a decision will be made in the first follow-up conversation. The potential sponsor will need time to digest the information you gave them, review the different sponsorship categories and

possibly gain approval from others in their organization. Establish a time that's convenient for the potential sponsors for you to follow-up. Not only is this an efficient way of working, it shows consideration for their time and adds a personal touch.

RETENTION

1. Timing is Everything – Although your organization may be on a calendar year, your sponsoring organization may be on a fiscal year end. Make note of this and contact them before the beginning of their new year as this is when they are budgeting for expenses.
2. Build Relationships – Existing sponsors should not be called on only once annually; rather, work to build relationships with them. Keep in communication with sponsors during the program and follow-up afterwards to ensure they were pleased with their decision to sponsor. This is a perfect opportunity to ask for feedback and any ideas for ways you can enhance the sponsorship package. Remember to touch base periodically throughout the year to keep them abreast of any new program happenings. Also, always be sure to copy sponsors on press releases, including photos when possible (i.e., your state team at the national competition).
3. Deliver on Your Promises – If your sponsorship kit lists that sponsors will receive a complimentary ¼ page ad in your association's publication, be sure to follow-through. These details are very easy to forget after signing on a sponsor, so be sure to place a reminder on your calendar when the publication space reservation deadline is approaching. The sponsor will appreciate the reminder and the fact that you followed through on your end of the deal. On the other hand, if you fail to deliver it may just be remembered at the most inopportune time – when sponsor renewal time comes back around and benefits are being reviewed.
4. Encourage Attendance/Involvement – Don't assume that sponsors don't want to be involved. Invite them to attend your program and witness it first-hand. You might be surprised that a sponsor wants to volunteer and be actively involved, but it is a great way for them to gain company exposure as well as personally see their return on their investment.
5. Recognize – Recognize sponsors at every opportunity – from the podium, in program brochures, newsletters, press releases, etc. Remember that sponsors make the event possible so give them the recognition they deserve.
6. Be Gracious – You may be tempted to show your gratitude to a sponsor by presenting them with expensive gifts, but don't. Sponsors have made a contribution so that your organization can fund an event. Expenditures need to be directly related to that event. A small token of appreciation or a nice letter of gratitude with a summary of what their sponsorship allowed you to accomplish is sufficient.

Remember, retaining a sponsor is much easier than recruiting one. Protect your investment by following the simple steps outlined above. If we handle our sponsors with care, we may just be able to count on their support for many years to come.