

CORPORATE SUPPORT FOR THE SMALL SHOP

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January 2006- If you believe that corporate support is just for large nonprofit organizations, think again. When your organization's mission is aligned with the strategic marketing or philanthropic goals of a company, a corporate relationship is not out of the question for smaller nonprofit organizations. But doing your research is critical in helping you find the most likely partners.

In finding the best companies to approach, there are a few important steps to follow. The first is to ask yourself two questions: what do you want out of a corporate relationship and how can you present a value-added package of benefits that is attractive to a business?

What you want out of the relationship may not only be financial support. A company can provide a great way to increase the organization's visibility within the company's market. Personnel support and in-kind gifts are also very tangible contributions. Before you approach a company, make sure you know what you are looking for and why that particular company should give it to you.

In presenting a value-added package of benefits, you first must take stock of what you, as an organization, can offer a business. Initially you should understand that community-minded businesses will, at a minimum, generally support the local community where their employees live and work. If your organization is part of that community and your mission is aligned with one or more of the company's goals, supporting your organization will make sense. For the business the most obvious benefit is exposure to your community. Your organization can offer this through access to your membership base, access to your mailing lists, access to attendees at conferences attended by a targeted group, and/or access to individuals that you serve. If your organization has a strong brand in the local or national community, that brand is a value-added benefit the company might want to leverage. Think of how you can create value-added benefit packages to offer businesses so the relationship is mutually beneficial.

The next step is to create a corporate prospect list. This list should include larger companies who have operations in your community and an interest in your mission as well as smaller local businesses that have the same. Most large companies and many small companies have web pages which detail their philanthropic focus. In addition to the corporate website, you can get information on corporate giving and links to community relations websites through the Foundation Center (http://www.fdncenter.org/funders/grantmaker/gws_corp/corp.html). The Foundation Center's online resources are extensive so physically getting to the building is not always necessary, but if you live in an area where there is a Foundation Center location, New York City, Atlanta, Cleveland, San Francisco and Washington, DC, there are additional useful resources like the National Directory of Corporate Giving. In addition, The Foundation Center has cooperating collections in libraries and other locations throughout the country. Details can be found at www.fdncenter.org. Articles in business publications and newspapers can often provide information about company interests that your organization might serve. For example, *BusinessWeek* regularly publishes articles about corporate giving. There are many other business publications that include articles that will help you in finding companies with an interest in your mission.

If you are able to pay a fee for services, you may want to look at the *Book of Lists* (www.bizjournals.com/bookoflists). It provides details on corporate giving across the country and breaks it down by metropolitan area. Depending upon the level of service you can buy, the Hoovers business database (www.hoovers.com) can list the name of the contact person who will be your organization's best contact.



If you cannot find this person through the use of these tools, call the company directly to try to find this person's name. Companies often support organizations from various areas within the company, so don't limit yourself to the foundation or community relations department if you believe your organization's market or mission will help the company sell more of its product, for example. The sales department might be interested in your ideas in this case.

When you have completed your prospect list, run it by your board of directors and colleagues. Does the board or do your colleagues have contacts in these companies? If so, these are the companies to be contacted first. The individual with the initial contact should set up the first call or meeting. Your board may also have other names they can add to the list.

For smaller local businesses that may not have their philanthropy goals presented on their website, stop in to see them. They may want to support your cause because you are a member of their community. If they ask you to drop off materials they can look at later, be certain to follow-up with a phone call in a few days.

After receiving a gift or sponsorship from a business, thank them and continue to cultivate your relationship with them throughout the year. You don't want that gift to be a one-time occurrence. Keep businesses informed about the result of their support – how did they make a difference?

Many non-profit organizations, large or small, can have success in seeking corporate support. The process is the same and the end result can be as well. Good luck developing your corporate relationships!

Other good information about corporate giving and related links can be found at the following websites:

www.nonprofits.org

www.indorgs.virginia.edu/portico

www.independentsector.org/mission_market/index.html

www.philanthropy.com

www.idealists.org

