

VI. Finding Sponsors For Your Cleanup

Corporate sponsors seem to be everywhere in today's world and it's not just the big River Cleanups that draw sponsors. Small, local Cleanups usually have several corporate sponsors, too.

Why is corporate sponsorship so prevalent? Quite simply, it makes money. Done correctly, it can make you a lot of money and build important relationships. Done poorly, it can cost you money and waste your time.

Below are tips on soliciting, acquiring and retaining corporate sponsors for your River Cleanup.

A. Set Sponsorship Levels

Make sure the benefits at each level are distinct and enticing enough to encourage previous sponsors to move up a level.

It's a good idea to have a wide range of levels so that smaller businesses as well as larger companies can find a level that suits their needs and budget. Sponsor levels might begin at \$100, \$200 or even \$1,000. Title sponsors receive maximum publicity, and their logo should appear in ALL publicity material.

You should base your sponsor levels on the benefits to the company. Put a price on each benefit you'll offer and add the prices in each level. This will give you an idea as to the cost of a sponsorship at each level.

Know in advance that you may have to be flexible and customize levels for some sponsors to meet their marketing needs. Some sponsors might be interested in a half cash, half in-kind (product donation) sponsorship. Food and beverage companies often would like to see their logo on T-shirts, hear their company name announced, etc. They may want to have a table or booth available to distribute their products, for instance at your central meeting point at the start of your Cleanup.

Depending on how you've organized your Cleanup, these are a few benefits you might want to consider offering:

- Sponsor banner displayed at the Cleanup meeting point or post Cleanup party;
- sponsor name announced at meeting point or party;
- sponsor name or logo in your newsletter;
- sponsor name or logo in advertisements in newspapers and magazines;
- sponsor ad in program or flyer;
- sponsor logo on your website (can include a hotlink to their site);
- sponsor-related post on your Facebook page;
- sponsor logo on T-shirt or other schwag; and
- sponsor table/product exposure at Cleanup party.

B. Make Lots of Phone Calls

The most time-consuming-but ultimately money-saving-step: Get on the phone and pitch your Cleanup as a great marketing opportunity.

Call local business to find out if they're interested in reaching your Cleanup volunteers. When you begin your conversation, focus on how the company will benefit: "This is Such And Such from My Organization. I thought you might be interested in marketing your company's products/services at our upcoming River Cleanup...do you have a few seconds?" Come up with a pitch that in 20 seconds OR LESS explains the Cleanup, who is going to be there and some benefits to their company. If they are interested, you can always go into more detail or send more information.

Your calls will vary with the type and size of company you contact. You'll probably speak directly to owners at small local businesses. Medium-size companies may have marketing departments or human resource departments that take care of sponsorships. Large companies receive countless requests for sponsorship, and they may have a sponsorship website that gives you their guidelines for requests. These companies usually put together their budgets once a year, often in October, so you may have to send your proposal months or even a year ahead. Be sure to pay attention to corporate areas of focus: some companies make commitments to only sponsor certain groups such as children or the elderly.

For potential sponsor ideas, talk to your board, staff and volunteers. Investigate their ideas and connections. See if any other similar events with similar audiences already exist, and review their sponsor lists.

Once you've made all these calls, review your notes and prepare a list of companies you will solicit. Yes, this takes a lot of time, but it can save your organization money. Instead of blindly sending out proposals to hundreds of businesses, ignoring their guidelines and focus areas, you can send dozens of proposals to companies who have already expressed interest in your Cleanup.

C. Send Proposal Letters

It's important that sponsors feel you are asking money specifically from their company, and they're not just part of a massive group.

Keep your letters short. As in your phone calls, concentrate on the exposure the company will receive for their money, not on how the money will help you. With large corporations, it's especially true that their marketing budgets are usually much larger than their charitable donations budget. You may come across a few companies that aren't as interested in the publicity; they want to sponsor your Cleanup because they truly believe in your organization's mission. They're a very rare but much appreciated bunch.

Whenever possible, customize the letter. A good attention-getter is attaching a post-it that says, "Thanks for speaking with me. Here's the information on our Cleanup." With the size and type of company in mind, request a particular level from each potential sponsor. Tell them the anticipated impressions such a sponsorship will yield. Impressions are calculated by finding the total number of times a sponsor's name will be seen or heard. For instance, say your Cleanup is expected to draw 100 people. Your entrant-level sponsors might receive: space to display a banner (100 impressions), their name announced twice (200 impressions), and their name in your organization's newsletter (350 impressions) and annual report (475 impressions), for a total of 1,125 impressions.

Make sure sponsor benefits are easily found in your letter and they're easy to understand. Consider using bullet points to make the benefits stand out. Make sure your letters include your name, address and phone number, the date and location of the Cleanup and the address(es) to send checks and in-kind donations. If you have 501(c)(3) status, be sure to say so, as some companies will only sponsor those agencies. If your letter doesn't include a short description (two paragraphs, or a few bullet points), on what your organization does, then include a one-page fact sheet or a tri-fold brochure on your organization. Hand-sign each letter.

Finally, include a chart or brochure that details sponsor benefits at each level. If this is the second time your organization is hosting the Cleanup, include a flyer that lists the sponsors and describes the number and types of volunteers from the previous time.

D. Follow Up

Don't be afraid to call potential sponsors to find out their thoughts on sponsorship.

After receiving your letter, some companies will call you to say they're interested in sponsoring. Most will not. It's up to you to follow up with them about two to three weeks after sending your proposal. Some people hesitate to follow up, thinking it will bother the company. Generally most large companies do not accept follow-up calls, so note that when you're making your initial call. But for those that do not mention "no follow-up," it is perfectly OK to do so. In fact,



it's the best way to find out that an interested company did not receive your letter.

Some interested companies may request face-to-face meetings, but most sponsor communication will be done via phone, fax and e-mail. One possible way to begin your follow-up call: "This is Such And Such from My Organization. I just wanted to follow up on the sponsorship request I sent. Do you have a few seconds?" If they don't, ask when would be a better time to call back. Then be sure to call back at the requested time. If they say yes, your response might be: "Do you have any questions? Does it look like something you might be interested in for this year?" If they aren't interested, find out why not. Keep good notes so you remember next year not to re-call people who said they definitely would not be interested. If they say yes, congratulations! You're on your way to building a strong list of sponsors.

E. Cultivate Your Relationships with Sponsors

Don't drop your sponsors once they've agreed to send you money.

One of the worst messages to send to a sponsor is: "I just cared about getting your money. Now that I've got it, I'm going to disappear." Make sure sponsors see that you value their support. Once a company has agreed to sponsor, send them a thank-you letter that recaps the benefits at the level they've chosen. After you receive their check, send another thank-you. If your organization has a newsletter, begin sending it to them. If you don't have a newsletter, send them periodical updates on your organization and/or the Cleanup. Any time you think a sponsor has a concern about something, give them a call. If a sponsor calls you, make it a point to return their call as soon as possible, and absolutely within 24 hours. If you'll be out of the office for a few days, make sure your voice message directs sponsors to a live person.



F. Cultivate Your Relationships with Non-sponsors

Perhaps people who weren't able to sponsor may be interested in attending your Cleanup.

As your Cleanup draws near, send invitations to some of the companies that did not sponsor. You might want to say something like, "Even though you weren't able to sponsor us this year, we hope you'll consider attending or volunteering during the River Cleanup." Sometimes, an employee from the company will attend, see what a great event it is, and make sure money is budgeted next year for sponsorship.

G. Give Your Sponsors Plenty of Publicity

Publicity is often why your sponsors signed on ... so make sure they get it!

This sounds obvious, but make sure your sponsors receive everything promised. If you can give them added publicity, by way of name announcement, etc., do so. You don't want to put all the work into acquiring sponsors and then not deliver results.

H. Cultivate Relationships with Sponsors, Part II

Don't drop your sponsors after the Cleanup.

Send thank-you letters to sponsors after the Cleanup. Let them know how successful the Cleanup was, how much trash was picked up, the final attendance count, etc. For sponsors at high levels (or, if your Cleanup was very small, for all sponsors), put together packets that showcase their publicity. Include copies of all the ads they appeared in, photos of their banners at the Cleanup, photos of people using their products at the Cleanup, etc. If some sponsors had any concerns at any point, give them a call to see how they think things worked out. Even after the final tasks of the