

ASSOCIATION SPONSORSHIP ACQUISITIONS

Marketing a sports organization is not an easy task. Frequently the membership is too small or geographically too dispersed to offer immediate benefits to the local sponsor. Only through proper positioning of the organization's role in the community can these disadvantages be overcome.

Proper planning includes:

- Formulation a plan,
- Defining the market,
- Creating a strategy,
- Identifying areas for sponsorship potential,
- Developing a "hit" list,
- Preparing a proposal in a workable time frame,
- Implementing a plan, and
- Evaluating and modifying the plan.

Formulating a Plan

Sponsorship proposals can be presented to an individual, a corporation or a foundation. But before presenting your proposal you must be ready to do your homework. A plan needs to be created.

Your Association's short-term and long-term goals must be identified before targeting sponsors. By understanding these goals you will be able to focus your efforts in specific areas (i.e., more programs for Masters T&F, added communications to your members, having a functioning website, etc.) and consequently target corporations with corresponding demographic targets (age, sex, race), community involvement goals (supporting minority or physically challenged programs), philanthropic activity, and emotional tie-ins.

The plan should include Association goals, and should list potential sponsors capable of attaining these goals. With this information, a customized proposal may be drawn up for each potential sponsor. The proposal should clearly state the sponsor's role in the achievement of the organization's particular goal.

Defining the Market

Businesses and corporations are often looking for "reach", which is how the association with your organization will help sell their product. Often this means they are looking for a large number of people who will be influenced into buying by seeing the corporate logo or hearing the product name. A potential sponsor must look at the cost effectiveness of the association.

It is necessary to prove cost effectiveness to the prospective sponsor with an accurate number of individuals you represent. The actual number of athletes (base) probably will not be an attractive amount; however, the base may be broadened by including other family members (those with the purchasing power) and the non-competing children within families that will be exposed to the sponsor. Do not stop there; broaden appeal by adding the audience that may learn of the sponsorship. Sponsors are very interested in the number of logo imprints that your organization can offer.

Creating a Strategy

Many organizations think that the solution to marketing their programs is to find a single, large sponsor that will provide consistent annual revenues. This strategy is attractive, but it does offer potential risks. Also, it is difficult to obtain a single sponsor because there is considerable competition for the few that are available.

If you obtain a single sponsor, a multi-year agreement is always a good idea. Many organizations have thought their financial problems solved, only to find that income was dependent upon the sponsor's financial position. If that position weakened, the support could be reduced or eliminated, creating a financial crisis for the receiving organization. Whenever possible it is important to renew expiring agreements by September 30 so that your Budget & Finance committee can develop an accurate budget for the coming year.

A more realistic strategy that reduces risk is to divide program needs into key categories and seek multiple sponsors for differing aspects of the program. Most sponsorship requests are either athlete, event, or program based. Listed below are some types of sponsorships to consider. (This is not a complete list, but provides a sample break down of sponsorships that might be solicited. It is important to establish a list of sponsorships that are unique to your organization and help to meet your objectives and budget.)

Identifying Areas for Sponsorship Potential

Athlete-based	Budget relief for event travel Matching funds for other fund-raising activities Financial aid for scholarships
Event-based	Sponsorship of competitions: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Stand-alone events- Series of linked events, such as a grand prix or all-comers series Sponsorship of parent/athlete/coaches clinics Sponsorship of annual awards and/or banquet Budget relief for necessary equipment Budget relief for facility improvements
Program-related	Sponsor for newsletter Sponsor for club recruiting Literature

Developing a "Hit" List

It takes time to compile a list of potential contributors, but knowing your resources can simplify the task. As part of the identification of potential sponsors, the names, addresses, and telephone numbers of the individuals responsible for evaluating sponsorship requests should be compiled. You will need some help to obtain this information.

First, look to the Association's membership and more specifically your board members. Individuals who are or have been involved in our sport or who have demonstrated a genuine interest in athletics are good prospects. Let your membership know of your search by publishing the sponsorship goals in the newsletter. Ask the membership to alert the organization to local businesses or corporations with sponsorship potential. Determine companies or products that the membership patronizes (fast foods, soft drinks, etc.). The greatest chance of success lies within the resources of the organization itself.

Next, look to businesses or products directly related to track such as sporting goods stores, running specialty stores, and equipment suppliers. These could offer budget relieving sponsorship and could be the easiest to sign on. For example, if your budget allocates \$1,200 annually to printing costs (meet programs, recruiting literature, newsletters, etc.) a local printing company might provide these services at no charge (value-in-kind or VIK). This provides your organization with budget relief that can be reallocated to other programs. This printing company might become your organization's "official printer" with appropriate advertising space in all printed material. The

objective is to realize that, although money seems a simple request, bud- get-relieving services are as good as money and sometimes easier to obtain.

Also, watch and listen to the media – local and regional newspapers, television, magazines, free local journals with calendar opportunities, and web sites in general – to see what companies sponsor similar organizations and activities. Company web sites often have a philanthropy section and will tell you the kinds of charitable opportunities they seek.

It is suggested that you maintain a spreadsheet with all potential sponsor contact information, as this will allow you to generate letters and envelopes efficiently and professionally.

After developing a list of potential sponsors, investigate each prospect and gain as much information about the organization as possible. This information should include demographic targets (age, sex, and race), com- munity involvement goals (supporting minority or physically challenged programs), philanthropic activity, and emotional tie-ins with sports. Again, look at the philanthropy section of their web site, where they will usually tell you who they have been involved with and what types of partnerships they are seeking. Remember, corporate sponsors must justify the expense of the sponsorship. Determine the potential sponsor's goals and present your organization's case as they relate to those goals.

Preparing the Proposal in a Workable Time Frame

For all requests, timing is critical. This does not refer to when your organization needs its support, but the best time to present the proposal to a potential sponsor. Requests should be submitted when the corporation is in the budget formulation process. This could be any month of the year because company's fiscal years vary. Although many corporations reserve funds to allocate on an "as needed" basis, it is not wise to rely on this money. Therefore, find out when the fiscal year begins and ask when they consider sponsorship re- quests. This will help decide when to submit the proposal.

Prepare a generic proposal that can be adapted to any prospective sponsor. Take this "shell" and customize it for each presentation, as some requests will require more collateral support than others. The proposal should be typed and bound. A bulky document will not be read; therefore, plan to keep it to a reasonable size.

Organize the proposal as follows:

- Title Page
- Mission Statement
- Executive Summary
- The Proposal
- Attachments

Some details of these topics include:

- **Title Page:** Present a clean, simple title of the proposal. The title can be reproduced on your organization's letterhead with logo.
- **Mission Statement:** This statement shows that the organization has defined its purpose. It may include a focus on youth, the community, amateur sports, etc. One of the first questions corporations and foundations will ask is, "Are you a non-profit organization?" It is appropriate to establish that criterion in this portion.
- **Executive Summary:** In one page, give the brief overview of the organization's history and accomplishments. Summarize the proposal with detail on one program or aspect of the program that helps fulfill the mission statement.

- **The Proposal:** The proposal should begin by showing how the association with your organization will benefit the corporation. This is really a written business plan and the prospective company will be impressed that you researched their goals and community involvement.

Continue with listing goals of the Association, detail strategies that will be used to meet the objective, and state the need for assistance to execute the strategies. Finally, end with a direct appeal based on the capabilities of the sponsor to fulfill that need. It is imperative that the proposal demonstrate a classic “win-win” for both parties. Do not simply ask for dollars, but show what the sponsor will receive in return. Again, if you have done your homework, the sponsor’s needs will be addressed accurately.

- **Attachments:** Include samples of the organization’s published literature (i.e., newsletters, brochures, etc.), publicity clips, and bios of athletes who will benefit from the acceptance of the proposal. Also, include the résumés of key personnel so that you enhance the professional image of the organization. Provide an Internal Revenue Service determination letter establishing the 501(c)(3) designation. Finally, it is appropriate that the organization’s budget and five-year plan be included in this part of the presentation.

Although each of these attachments will enhance the proposal, pursue opportunities as they present themselves. Do not delay a timely request for sponsorship just because all the support materials have not been pulled together. Remember that the Association will most likely be using talented volunteers. It may take many months to construct the ideal proposal format. Construct it, but do not delay requesting support while waiting for it to be completed.

Implementing a Plan

Now that you have formulated a proposal, targeted a group of prospects and developed a specific proposal, the decision of how and when to submit the request for support is necessary. It is critical in this phase to use appropriate personnel for the presentation and to provide the follow-up necessary to secure the support.

Just as you evaluated potential sponsors in order to select a targeted list, you must evaluate the talent in the organization to ensure proper handling of the personal contact. Recognize that the person who conducts the research or writes the proposal may not be the best choice for inclusion in a business meeting. Identify members with business experience who are comfortable making formal presentations. This person should sign the cover letter which accompanies the proposal. The cover letter should end by stating that a contact will be made on a certain date to arrange for an appointment for a formal presentation.

Sometimes there may be no formal presentation. But, if the prospect allows a formal presentation, it is important to have a printed agenda and a time limit set before the meeting.

The presentation should consist of a review of the proposal and a question and answer period. It is important that the organization’s representative be sensitive to stated concerns and addresses them openly during this phase of the request. When appropriate, emphasize the benefits to be gained by the sponsor.

Presenting a proposal for sponsorship is essentially a sales call. Therefore, as its first objective, the call should seek a commitment to the proposal. If the sponsor is not ready to make a commitment, establish what the next step should be. If the potential sponsor wants to evaluate the proposal or share it with others within the organization, offer additional information as needed. If needed, commit to a date by which the information will be provided. Try to determine when they will make the decision before concluding the meeting.

Modifying and Evaluating the Plan

A salesman closes very few deals at the first meeting. If you are not granted acceptance during the presentation, recognize that a follow-up will be necessary. Be sure you maintain contact with the potential sponsor at appropriate intervals. Even if a sponsor declines the opportunity to support your organization, maintain contact. The more the sponsor knows about the Association, the more probable a chance of success.

A successful committee will constantly evaluate the plan. Changes will always be in order to make the plan more appealing to the sponsor community. After each presentation or round of presentations, you should step back, compare the plan to the results it did or did not produce, and make the appropriate modifications for the future.