

Guide

Preparing for a meeting with a potential corporate partner

Sarah Winchester

Fundraising Consultant



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 2.0 UK: England & Wales License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/2.0/uk/)

Published 2015

Managed by



Supported by



Supported using public funding by
**ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND**



In partnership with



“It is frustrating when a charity knows nothing about the business. It means I’ve got to do a lot of work just to get them to a point where we can start exploring a potential partnership. People who turn up and have obviously done their research really stand out”

**Carrie Adams, Community Investment, News UK
(Carrie is now Head of Diversity and Inclusiveness at EY)**

“Sitting down with someone, expecting them to invest in your world, without having done your research about their world is at best a massive missed opportunity”

Steve Wickham, Founding Director, The Giving Department

“At The Prince’s Trust we raise £16million from our corporate partners. This would not be possible without us having a keen understanding, curiosity and passion for those businesses”

Tara Leathers, Director of Fundraising, The Prince’s Trust

Educate yourself

If you want and need to secure funding from businesses you have to commit to understanding them and the industry in which they operate.

Therefore, if you are not already excited by the world of business it is important you find a way to bring it to life. If you don’t know where to start, spend time on the business website of a brand you admire, or read about an industry that interests you, e.g. fashion, sport, design.

For some people, big business can represent a lot that is wrong in the world. If you are one of these people, start by learning more about ethical business practices – check out Forbes top 50 ethical businesses.

Focus your research

Find out the following through their website:

- What does their business do? What industry are they part of – construction? Technology? Financial services?

This is the essential basics but you also might identify ways that your organisation’s work complements that of your potential funders. E.g. an education charity based in South East Asia that is working in a country deemed as an emerging market for a financial services company

- Who are their clients?

You may already be working with one of their clients or be connected with a client of theirs in some way. This can add weight to your conversations because a partnership with you may further strengthen the businesses' link with its client.

- Where are they based? Do they have more than one office? Are they global?

Quite simply a case of establishing geographic similarities and ideally being able to say 'we are where you are'.

- How has their business evolved over time?
- Notice what sort of language and imagery they are using. What their values and mission statements are.

Understanding where a business has come from often helps explain its culture. Exploring how you fit alongside a company's values and culture can be key to securing a partnership.

- Have they been in the news recently? If not, what was their last press story about?

What is in the press is what is going to be important to them. There might also be hints in there as to where a charity partnership could help the business – e.g. reputational issues, unite employees during difficult times (acquisition, merger etc.), excellent profits therefore money to give away!

- Who is their CEO? How long have they been in post?

Employees may mention them by name, it is important you know who they referring to. Understanding a little bit about the CEO, their background, how long they have been in post will give you a better understanding of the organization.

- How many employees do they have?

This is not always easy to find out but useful for giving you a sense of size and therefore potential to engage, fundraise from etc.

- Are they sponsoring anything – a sporting event, cinema experiences etc?

There may well be ways to link in with sponsorships to demonstrate an alignment of brand. E.g. UKSA, a sailing charity on the Isle of Wight, being supported by Aberdeen

Asset Management who sponsor Cowes Week. This partnership reinforces AAM's presence with this affluent audience; not only do they sponsor the prestigious event, they also give back to the community where it is held through the sport.

- Do they have a Corporate Community Investment (CCI) or Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) strategy?

If they have a CCI/CSR Strategy

Make sure you know as much as you can about it, including:

- What they are trying to achieve through CCI

Knowing this in advance of a meeting will help you understand how your organisation might fit into their plans

- How much they give away and who they have given to in the past
- What form have previous partnerships taken – just money, or volunteering and money etc.

Non-for-profit organisations can be found guilty of believing businesses have very large amounts of money to give away. Unfortunately, this is very rarely the case. The majority of CCI Strategies operate within incredibly strict and restrictive guidelines and CCI 'investments' are scrupulously monitored and evaluated.

It is, therefore, essential to research the scale and make-up of previous partnerships, to manage your own expectations about what is possible with a corporate partner and ensure any ask is pitched at the right level. That is not to say that ambition should be left at the door. If you can clearly demonstrate impact against CCI objectives be prepared to discuss scale.

- How they involve their people

This is useful for trying to gauge what has worked in the past and what may not yet have been tried.

- Who in the business is involved in the decision making e.g. is there a board of Trustees for a Foundation linked to the business? If yes, who sits on it?

This will help you understand the process any application/proposal will need to go through, helping you decide how best to follow up and track progress. You may also want to explore any connections you may have with the decision makers.

- The selection criteria they use to decide which organisations to support

Ensure you know which areas of the criteria you fit, which you have questions about and where you have concerns if any.

Also investigate:

- Who their competitors are/might be (not always easy)

Understanding a little about their competitors could provide you with ideas for positioning your partnership as a way for the business to further differentiate themselves from the competition.

- What their turnover is and their profit – use websites like duedil.com and hoovers.com

This will give you a sense of the businesses' size and how well it is performing.

Be aware of existing or past connections

It isn't always possible to grasp who knows who across two organisations but it is wise to check internally to see if anyone has connections with the potential corporate funder before meeting up.

If you do unearth some existing connections make sure you explore them; who knows who? How senior is the contact? If they are senior, how well does your colleague know them? Then make a plan for engaging them at the right time with a specific objective.

Conclusion

All this will help you to position your organisation's needs and your 'ask' in a way that complements your potential partner's business activities and ultimately demonstrates how a partnership will help the company deliver results.

About CultureHive

This guide was produced as part of CultureHive, a free knowledge hub where you can discover and share best practice in cultural marketing and fundraising. Visit culturehive.co.uk for more great resources.