Corporate giving – Making an ask

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Introduction



Corporate giving is an area of funding that many organisations want to develop but frequently do not move beyond asking for raffle prizes. Corporate giving can provide a good source of unrestricted income, but will rely on you being able to build and maintain a positive relationship with the business.

Large businesses provide only 2% of the UK voluntary sector's income (CAF Online). There is therefore huge potential for companies to give more, for more companies to give, and for companies to be better givers. For this to happen organisations will also need to become more active in making approaches to them for support.

It is important to understand that this is a two-way relationship, and you will need to be clear about not just what your organisation wants from the business, but also what your organisation can offer them.

1. Understanding corporate giving

Before making an approach/ask, it is important to understand the business's motivations for wanting to support you. These may include:

- Improving brand perception and public relations. (If the business has a poor reputation, this may have a negative impact on your organisation.)
- Engaging employees through volunteering and fundraising.
- Meeting their sustainability or Environmental, Social, and Governance goals. Check to see if they have a Corporate Social Responsibility contract, which will set out what they want to achieve.
- Building long-term partnerships that align with their values and objectives.
- Having access to your membership/service users.

2. Research and targeting

There can be a tendency to target larger, wealthy businesses, but these are also going to be targeted by other charities.

Before making any ask, you need to carefully research who you are going to target. You may create a shortlist of several businesses and then review them to identify which is the best match for you. There can be a tendency to target larger, wealthy businesses, but these are also going to be targeted by other charities. If you do not have a connection to them and they are not inclined to make donations, you could be wasting time pursuing them.

Investing time at this stage will increase the likelihood of getting the sponsorship/support that you want. There are three key areas to consider:

- **Capacity** – Does the business have the capacity to make a donation or give you the support that you are seeking? There is little point in pursuing a very small local shop with low turnover if you need a large donation to be made. You may find local business 'Rich Lists' or similar that give details of income levels of local businesses.
- **Connection** – What connections does the business have to you? How does it align with your cause, values, and geographical area? Some employees may be volunteers for you or be known to your staff/trustees. The business may also have values that align closely with your cause.
- **Inclination** – Do they have an interest in giving? Have they supported other organisations? Have they supported you before – even if this is just giving a raffle prize?

Having all three of these in place will make it more likely that you will be able to get a positive response from the business. You may have ethical considerations about the companies that you are prepared to accept gifts from. Makes sure there will be no reputational damage through the connections and subsequent publicity that may occur.

3. Preparing your ask

Once you have identified the businesses that you want to approach, you need to prepare the ask and develop a clear proposal. This should include:

- **Your charity's mission** – Briefly explain what you do, why it matters, and the impact you create.
- **Why Their support matters** – Highlight how their contribution will make a difference and align with their corporate social responsibility objectives. Use statistics, case studies, and compelling stories to illustrate your impact.
- **Be clear about the support you need**. This could include:
    - Financial donations (one-off or ongoing sponsorships)
    - In-kind support (products, services, office space, equipment)
    - Employee volunteering and mentoring opportunities
    - Payroll giving or matched donation schemes
    - Sponsorship of events or specific programmes
    - Cause-related marketing partnerships
    - Pro bono professional services (e.g., legal, marketing, IT support)

You may want to consider asking for support in the first instance that is non-financial to test the water and begin building a relationship with the business.

- **Be clear about what you offer** – Explain how supporting you will benefit them – this may be good publicity, raising awareness of their services/products, or giving them access to your members/service users.
- **Impact measurement** – Depending on what support is sought, you may need to explain how you will measure and report on the outcomes of their support. Provide clear Key Performance Indicators, reports, and testimonials.

If this information can be summarised in a single-page document (300-400 words), it can be used to leave with businesses following any discussion as a reminder of the help you need.

4. Making the approach

Check the business website and any local contacts you may have to get the name of the person to contact.

Once you have identified the business(es) that you want to approach and created a clear case for support, you will need to make an approach to the business. It is important to get this right, as it is likely to be the first impression that the business has of your charity. Sometimes, it is also worth holding off making the initial ask; for instance, you may have a good news story about to be released which will raise your profile and understanding of what you do, making it more likely that the business has heard about you.

- **Find the right contact** – You need to engage with someone who has the authority to make the decision. Check the business website and any local contacts you may have to get the name of the person to contact. LinkedIn can also be a useful tool for identifying contacts.
- **Initial outreach** – Using the information from the proposal, send a concise, personalised email or letter introducing your charity, explaining why their support is relevant, and requesting a meeting. This

should be signed by someone senior within your organisation, either your chair or chief officer. You want to show that you are taking the approach seriously and that it is important enough for someone in a senior position to be making the ask.

- **Be professional and concise** – Clearly state what you are asking for and how it benefits both parties. Keep communication clear and engaging.
- **Follow up** – If no response is received, send a polite follow-up message after a week or two. Consider alternative communication methods like a LinkedIn message or phone call.
- **Prepare for meetings** – Bring a well-structured proposal, impact data, and potential partnership ideas to the meeting. This can act as a prompt for your ask and also be left for them as a reminder of what you are asking for and what you offer them.
- **The meeting** – This should be attended by your chair/senior staff member. If two attend, ensure they have the same story and understanding. It will not look good if they contradict each other in a meeting.

Do not worry if there are silences in the meeting; this allows them to think – you do not need to fill the silence.

Do not necessarily expect an answer in your first meeting. They may want time to think and consider your proposal or speak to others in the business.

Thank them for their time after the meeting and ensure you leave contact details for any follow-up communication.

If you secure the support make sure that any required monitoring or reporting is proportionate to the contribution received.

5. Building long-term relationships



As with all fundraising activities, building long-term relationships is essential for ongoing support. Following any gift/support from a business, consider how you can build upon it in a way that benefits both sides.

Crucially, once any support has been given, say thank you. This applies to everything from shops giving items for a raffle to corporations making cash donations. Other ways to build relationships include:

- Offering recognition, such as social media shout-outs, logo placements on materials, or invitations to networking events.
- Providing updates on how their support has made a difference through impact reports, newsletters, and testimonials.
- Engaging their employees by inviting them to volunteer opportunities, charity challenges, or fundraising events.
- Engaging their employees in team building days at the organisation – such as creating a garden or painting a room
- Exploring ongoing opportunities for collaboration beyond one-off donations, such as multi-year funding agreements, co-branded campaigns, or deeper integration into corporate social responsibility strategies.
- Demonstrating your professionalism and reliability by maintaining consistent communication and delivering on any commitments.

6. Overcoming objections

Even with good preparation, you may encounter objections, such as:

- **Budget constraints** – Suggest alternative ways the business can support you, like in-kind donations, fundraising initiatives, or offering employee expertise.
- **Relevance to their business** – Highlight the mutual benefits, such as brand visibility, positive PR, enhanced employee engagement, and alignment with corporate social responsibility goals.
- **Timing issues** – If they have already allocated their budget for the year, discuss future opportunities or ways to engage through volunteering or fundraising initiatives.

7. Practical tips for success

- Be clear, concise, and compelling in your communication.
- Show appreciation regardless of the outcome – a ‘thank you’ can leave a positive impression for future opportunities.
- Keep records of conversations, who you have met, and when.
- Stay informed about trends in corporate giving.
- Network at corporate events to build relationships before making an ask.

Further resources

Chartered Institute of Fundraising

https://ciof.org.uk/events-and-training/resources/corporate-fundraising

Charity Excellence

https://www.charityexcellence.co.uk/companies-that-donate-to-charity

Help to find potential partners

CAF Online

https://www.cafonline.org/corporate-giving