

Do You Treat Event Sponsors Like One Night Stands?

Do you treat event sponsors like one night stands? Many organizations are guilty of this practice and it can make an individual or business feel used, undervalued and less than invested in your organization's success. Icema Gibbs, Director of Corporate Social Responsibility at JetBlue, said at a recent AFP event, "I gave a large donation to an organization for its event and I thought we were dating. But when the phone call never came, I realized I was just one of many."

Instead of taking an event-centric approach, focus on cultivating long-term relationships with event sponsors. Give them the same level of respect and the same mindset you bring to prospects for major gifts.

Kristin Steele of [Swaim Strategies](#) said in a recent webcast, "If we can create emotional resonance between our organizations and our donors, we're going to evolve out of the transactional relationship that we have with them. When people feel they're treated like a checkbook, eventually they're going to move on to someplace they're seen as people taking action to change the world." Steele continues, "The event is an opportunity. When people walk into a room and the event wraps its arms around them and brings them into the organization, they feel like they're a part of something."

1) Research and Target Prospects

Too often, event sponsorships are solicited via a onetime letter and a follow up call. Instead of using this "shotgun" method of reaching out to a large number of unsubstantiated prospects, selectively target a "Top 10" list of prospects and dig in.

Find these prospects by talking to people who already support your mission: board members, community supporters and even existing sponsors. Who else do they know for you to approach? Remember, you're just asking for recommendations. By offering to do the heavy lifting, aka "the ask," you make it more likely they'll participate with suggestions.

Do your research of that person's or company's past community giving and see if you can identify any patterns. Utilize a [Donor Search](#) firm to help your organization pinpoint your most likely prospects for long-term engagement. Look for "signs", such as previous donations to your organization or a similar nonprofit and review personal information, such volunteering history and membership on boards. ([Learn more about prospect screening.](#))

Add these prospects to your newsletter lists, mailings and holiday appeal letters and then communicate with them regularly. This will foster familiarity and will ensure they'll have some awareness of the work you do by the time you reach out and ask for a substantive contribution.

2) Talk to Potential Sponsors

In Major Gifts, "asks" are personalized and done in person. To acquire major corporate sponsors for your event, follow suit by asking for an appointment. Remember, your contact at the sponsor is a "real person" and people give to people, most often for emotional versus logical reasons. Be prepared to illustrate what your organization is doing and invite your prospective sponsors, as individuals, to participate. Getting prospects personally involved will directly affect their company's involvement.

Build a compelling case as to why this potential sponsor should be invested in your organization's mission. When you meet, know your statistics and the impact of your mission's work on their own employee base. For example, if you work in a mental health agency, you might cite the statistic that up to one third of Americans report they've struggled with mental health issues. Then, break this down to the number of people in the company who may be affected and possibly helped by your agency. Make the case that your agency helps their company be more stable by providing a valuable service to the community.

Ask questions to determine their "sweet spots" and motivations:

- Do they have any direct connections to your work?
- What do they look to gain from supporting your organization?
- What can you offer to make supporting you more appealing?
- Is it in their interest to engage their employees to volunteer for your agency?
- Can you plan a day on site to discuss your work and rally employees behind the mission?

Would they be interested in spending time getting to know your [nonprofit personally](#)?

3) Propose a Multi-Year Commitment

Let the company know that the problems you tackle are not a "quick fix." Ask for a 3-5 year commitment of annual sponsorship dollars or donations. Remember, if you don't ask, you don't get. And any good business person should understand that successful ventures are not realized without a multi-year investment. This is good business and a "major gifts" strategy that has been proven to work.

Your long term donors are people and organizations that you are able to move along your cultivation cycle because they're *known donors*. They feel valued and validated in their generosity and in supporting your organization.