Business Engagement: tips and best practice for community groups

INTRODUCTION

Strong corporate partnerships are built on clarity, shared values, professionalism, and genuine human connection. With careful planning, open communication, and a focus on mutual benefit, community groups can create sustainable relationships that benefit businesses and deliver lasting positive impact for both the community and the business sector.

This area of our website outlines practical guidance, considerations, and best-practice principles to support community groups in developing successful business or corporate relationships.

WHY BUSINESSES PARTNER WITH CHARITIES

Understanding what motivates businesses to engage with the community can help you build stronger partnerships.

Supporting charities and community groups is not only good for society, it also makes good business sense. Being able to explain the benefits clearly can make a real difference when securing and maintaining a partnership.

Understanding CSR

Many businesses have, or are working towards, a Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) policy. This is a commitment to operating in a way that is ethical, socially responsible and beneficial to the wider community.

CSR helps businesses invest in:

People

The Environment

Local Communities

Partnering with charities is a practical way for businesses to demonstrate their commitment to social responsibility.

Before approaching a business, check whether they have a CSR policy and align your proposal with their values, priorities and brand voice.

There are a wide range of benefits that businesses gain from community engagement:

I. Reputation and brand positioning

Customers increasingly choose to support businesses that demonstrate strong values and a commitment to their communities.

Partnering with charities and community groups can strengthen brand reputation, build trust and help businesses stand out in a competitive marketplace.

EXAMPLE

Tesco's long-standing partnership with Diabetes UK has helped reinforce its commitment to community wellbeing while strengthening public trust in the brand.

II. PR and Social Media Content

Community partnerships create authentic stories that businesses can share through PR and social media.

From volunteering and fundraising events to impact stories and success celebrations, these partnerships provide engaging content that helps build trust and connect with audiences.

EXAMPLE

Nationwide Building Society's partnership with Shelter has generated powerful, shareable content around housing and homelessness, a cause closely linked to its purpose and customers.

III Tax Benefits

Supporting a registered charity can offer financial benefits for businesses.

In the UK, charitable donations can reduce a company's Corporation Tax bill, meaning the actual cost of giving may be lower than expected. Donations of goods, services or expertise may also qualify for tax relief.

A £5,000 donation could cost significantly less once tax relief is taken into account.

Encourage businesses to speak with their accountant to understand the tax benefits available to them.

IV. Attracting and Retaining Customers

A visible commitment to community and social good enhances a company's appeal to customers who share those values. It can also strengthen relationships with existing clients and help attract new business from organisations that prefer to work with socially responsible suppliers and partners.

> A local solicitors firm sponsors a charity 5K and shares its involvement through social media, newsletters and its website, helping attract customers who value community-focused businesses.

V. Benefits for employees and staff retention

People want to work for employers they are proud of. Businesses that actively support their communities tend to report higher levels of employee engagement, morale, and loyalty.

Volunteering opportunities give staff a sense of purpose beyond their day-to-day role, support personal and professional development, and foster stronger team relationships. This is increasingly important in a workplace culture where employees — particularly younger generations — want to know that their employer shares their values and is committed to making a positive difference.

VI. Recruitment and Talent Attraction

A strong CSR profile is a valuable recruitment tool. Increasingly, candidates research a company's values and community commitments before accepting a role. Businesses that actively support charities and community groups are more likely to stand out as employers of choice, helping them attract and retain talented employees.

This is particularly important for younger generations, who want to work for organisations that align with their values and make a positive impact. Deloitte's 2023 Gen Z and Millennial Survey found that more than half of respondents research a company's social and environmental commitments before accepting a job. Research by Cone Communications also found that three quarters of Millennials would consider taking a pay cut to work for a socially responsible company.

More than **50%** of Gen Z and Millennials research a company's values before accepting a job, and **75%** of Millennials would consider taking a pay cut to work for a socially responsible organisation. (Deloitte, 2023)

DID YOU KNOW?

VII. Stakeholder confidence and investor relations

Investors, funders, and stakeholders pay close attention to how businesses conduct themselves beyond their financial performance. A demonstrable commitment to social responsibility strengthens stakeholder confidence, supports Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) reporting, and can positively influence investment decisions.

When approaching a business, don't be afraid to make this case clearly and confidently. You are not simply asking for help — you are offering them a genuine opportunity to strengthen their brand, motivate their people, and deliver on their values. That is a compelling proposition.

You are not asking for a favour. You are offering a genuine opportunity

FINDING A CORPORATE PARTNER

I. Accessing and leveraging networks

Connections play a key role in successful engagement.

01

Before making contact, do your research and identify the right person to approach — whether that is a CSR manager, a director, or a business owner. Reaching the right individual from the outset saves time and significantly increases your chances of a positive response.

02

Approach local business associations and networking groups — they often have direct links with businesses seeking to engage with the community.

03

Use personal and local contacts, particularly those emotionally connected to your cause, as these relationships are more likely to be sustainable. Who do you already know?

04

Use Linkedin to research and connect with the right people in the right roles.

05

Be confident about what you can offer. Businesses want to know how they will benefit from a partnership — and your supporters may feel more inclined to do business with companies that support you.

06

If possible, train your volunteers or staff in how to approach businesses.

II. Demonstrating value and impact

01 Define your unique selling point — what makes you a cause worth supporting over other local organisations? Know your data and have case studies and real-life scenarios readily available as evidence.

02 Clearly explain how business resources will be used and the difference they will make — whether that is IT support, marketing assistance, or volunteering at an event.

03 Mission alignment is key between the partners.

04 Regularly evidence the impact the business has helped achieve and make them feel great about their contribution.

05 Consider developing a simple Theory of Change to clearly articulate the pathway to the change you want to see, helping partners understand your plan and its impact.

06 Help businesses understand and maximise the return on their investment — whether through tax relief, employee benefits, or reputational gain. The more clearly you can demonstrate ROI, the easier it is for them to say yes and to justify the decision internally.

07 Know your costings up front and present clearly and succinctly. Include overheads (15-20% for example). Communicate that it is group policy to include overheads.

Remember that businesses are approached by many deserving charities and community groups, so be clear on what makes you different and the fit between you and your corporate partner.

II. Professionalism and human connection

Building trust, credibility, and relationship is at the heart of every successful partnership.

Be authentic, yet professional — avoid being overly formal, but remember that businesses expect a certain standard in communications. You may come to represent them through your partnership, so present yourself — and your charity — as a credible and positive ambassador.

Remember you're talking to a person, not a company — businesses are made up of individuals who, despite corporate structures, genuinely want to help and make a positive difference. Lead with that human connection.

Be understanding of the challenges businesses face. Take time to understand their policies and decision-making processes, and work together to identify ways to overcome potential barriers.

IV. Volunteering and professional skills

Business support can take many forms beyond traditional volunteering days. Some businesses may view CSR narrowly — a one-off volunteering activity, for example — so community groups may need to gently guide partners towards understanding the fuller range of ways they can help. Be clear and specific about what you need.

Support might include:

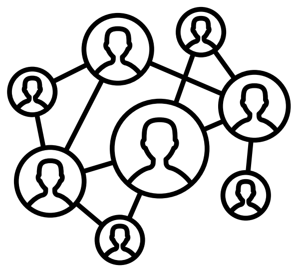
Social media, communications, marketing, or design assistance

Website improvements or accounting and financial expertise

Products, services, training, skill-sharing, or mentoring

Employee release to act as a trustee

Help planning events or hands-on assistance on the day



Introductions to people in their network to help grow your support base and delivery or transport assistance

Do also consider any practical barriers — for example, insurance requirements for volunteer drivers — and address these early to avoid them becoming obstacles down the line.

V. Strategic Planning and Clarity of Purpose

Engaging successfully with local businesses begins with strong internal planning.

- Define your objectives before approaching a business — be clear on your aims and desired outcomes.
- Secure internal buy-in from your board or committee, and identify who in your organisation can add value to a corporate partnership.
- Be realistic about what is achievable for both parties, taking into account capacity, resources, and timescales. Long-term partnerships can take time to develop — build this into your planning. Be realistic about the resource and time needed to complete projects.
- Consider collaborating with other organisations where values or causes align. A continued theme strengthens impact — for example, if your focus is homelessness, consider approaching a building developer, or look for companies based near to you.

- Be clear on the expected duration of the partnership from the outset. Businesses will often commit for up to a year, or for the length of a specific project — but whatever the timeframe, make sure both parties are aligned on what support is needed and for how long.

VI. Partnership, Co-Creation and Ongoing Relationship

Building a relationship is most effective when treated as a partnership rather than a transactional arrangement.

- Co-create the engagement strategy with the business, identifying shared goals and mutual benefits.
- Approach discussions with a mindset of "how can we help each other?"
- Ensure the connection is genuine — partnerships are unlikely to succeed if values, needs, or motivations are not aligned.
- Have an agreement, this does not need to be complicated but ensures things are clear and can be referred back to if needed.

> Aligned values should underpin agreed objectives, a shared plan, and clarity on how the business will contribute resources, time, or expertise.

VII. Keeping the relationship alive

Corporate relationships evolve and require ongoing attention.

Be aware that individuals move roles and organisational strategies change over time. Check you are always talking to the right person — someone with the ability to make decisions, or who can meaningfully influence those who do.

Plan in advance for the potential end of a partnership — what happens if the relationship ends, and will there be any ongoing connection?

Risk assess and plan for all eventualities to minimise disruption to funding and other support. Line up the next potential partnerships.

VIII. Recognition, communication, and celebration

- Say thank you in genuine, innovative ways, whether privately or publicly.

- Use LinkedIn and other social media platforms to share positive news and celebrate your partnership publicly — a strong communications strategy is key to maximising the visibility and impact of your relationship.

- Celebrate successes and milestones together and maintain regular communication to reinforce the partnership.

- Be positive, flexible, and approachable — successful partnerships should be enjoyable for both parties.

- Continually reflect on what sets your organisation apart, learn from experience, and build on wins to strengthen future engagement.

Some general points:

- Relations with corporates can be truly valuable but should not be seen as a rescue plan or a replacement for grants.
- They are not quick and easy and require long term and continual input.
- Know your value and worth as a community group or charity and do not underestimate this.

FURTHER READING AND USEFUL RESOURCES

Guidance and best practice

- NCVO – Corporate Fundraising
- NPC – Building Impactful Corporate-Charity Partnerships
- Charity Digital – How to Establish a Corporate Partnership
- Corporate Giving Report 2025
- Charity Commission – Trust in Charities 2025

Finding corporate partners

- Charity Excellence Framework – Charity of the Year Partnerships
- Directory of Social Change – Guide to UK Company Giving 2025/26

Understanding CSR and the business perspective

- Chartered Institute of Fundraising – Corporate Partnerships Guidance

- Save the Children – Three Trends Shaping the Future of Business-Charity Partnerships

Real-world examples and case studies from larger charities

- Charity Digital — Best charity and business collaborations with practical takeaways:https://charitydigital.org.uk/topics/the-best-charity-and-business-collaborations-of-2021-9637

- Raw London — Five well-known corporate partnership campaigns including Cadbury/Age UK and Movember/Pringles: https://raw.london/top-5-corporate-partnership-campaigns/

- Remarkable Partnerships — Game-changing partnership stories with lessons from real pitches and outcomes: https://www.remarkablepartnerships.com/game-changing-moments-that-shaped-charity-and-corporate-partnerships/

- SOFII — A curated collection of fundraising case studies including Cancer Research UK/Slimming World: https://sofii.org/the-fundraisers-toolbox/remarkable-partnerships

Health/medical sector specific

ABPI — Charity-industry partnership case study library, particularly relevant given ERI's health focus: https://www.abpi.org.uk/partnerships/patient-involvement/charity-industry-partnership-case-study-library/