

How to... secure a sponsor/ support

Whether you are approaching a potential sponsor, businesses, your local authority or even community members, there are a few key things to have in place first:

Have a clear action plan – potential supporters will want to know what you want to achieve and how you are going to make a difference to your local community.

Make a 'shopping' list – identify what you need to complete your project, whether that's plants, tools or professional help for bigger, more specialist jobs.

Create a budget – even if it is not exact nor very elaborate, it is important to have some idea of what the costs are to make your project a reality and to be able to show this to people you approach for help (as appropriate).

Create a prospects list – look for potential supporters who have a good reason to link to your campaign – many companies, both local and national, want to be seen to be supporting the local community. Others might want to illustrate their green credentials by supporting your Bloom campaign. Identify the best person at each organisation to speak to and once you have the list, prioritise those you think are most likely to support you.

Understand your audience – you should have a specific plan for each company, organisation, individual etc. that you approach. Think about who they are, what they do, how they might help you and even why they might help you.

Once you have done the initial preparation work and you're ready to start contacting potential supporters there is one more thing you should do: prepare your pitch! While your project will be a worthwhile endeavour, the potential supporter will still want to know how they might benefit by supporting you – you need to be able to show what they will get out of the partnership. This could be: brand placement at key events/ locations; access to a large audience of gardeners/ residents; product placement opportunities; logos and adverts in your materials/ campaign materials in newspapers/ good PR stories etc.

You will get the best results if you consider each organisation individually and clearly make the case for how a partnership between you could be mutually beneficial. A generic cover letter to multiple recipients will almost always fail.

In any proposal, make sure that you:

- Give the name of your group and its status (e.g. whether you are a voluntary group or a charity) and the main contact details
- Describe the purpose of your work with aims and objectives
- Provide a timetable of work and when the likely date of completion will be
- Mention any special events you might have planned
- State clearly what you are asking for (a specific amount of money, goods, services, volunteers etc.)
- Make the person you are speaking to aware of any support you may already have secured or that has been pledged

RHS BRITAIN IN BLOOM advice sheet

- List any celebrities or well-known local characters or 'VIPs' who are supporting you
- Clearly explain how supporting your activities will benefit them and how you will be publicising and acknowledging their support
- If you are submitting a financial report showing how you would spend the money you are asking for, ensure all the figures are correct
- Keep copies of whatever you send to a potential sponsor and seek feedback on any failed bids so that you can improve and make a more appropriate case next time.
- And finally, don't underestimate the power of positive publicity. Publicise what you are doing as much as you can. In addition to helping you to communicate better with other community members, you never know who might hear about your efforts and then come to you to offer their support.

Tips from groups

- In 2011, Bury in Bloom secured a three-year sponsorship deal with Silver Spoon to support the campaign to the tune of £25,000. The deal was coordinated by Bury in Bloom Campaign Manager, Julia Rackowe, who has professional fundraising experience. Julia shared her top fundraising tips in autumn 2011's *Growing Communities* magazine:
 - If you can, employ a professional, even if it's just on a part-time basis. The income that they will be able to generate will make this worthwhile.
 - A Bloom group's biggest fundraising asset is signage; make sure that you have a good relationship with your local council and that they will allow you to position signage on roundabouts/ public flower beds. Bloom groups can help councils to enhance areas by bringing in external funding, but they can only do this if they have the ability to acknowledge their sponsor's support.
 - Keep in touch with your sponsors; make sure they get invited to all your key events and publicly thanked for their support at every opportunity.
 - Enlist support from across your group - our Treasurer's business background was invaluable in helping me to negotiate the Silver Spoon deal.
 - Be clear about what you can offer before you approach a sponsor. What are you all about and what branding opportunities could you offer to a potential sponsor.
- Make any request as early as possible and offer something in return even if it is only a mention in PR story. If possible look for fund matching not full funding. If you don't ask you don't get so try any and all large employers and again do not just ask for money, consider materials and man power and always acknowledge any donations or support. (*Airedale Shopping Centre in Bloom*)
- Local businesses will often provide support so forge good links with them at the onset. (*Kensington Road Residents Association, Bristol, IYN*)
- Look for opportunities to 'hang' initiatives on – we approached a housing association to establish a mini-orchard. We promised 40 trees to celebrate their 40th birthday and they've contributed. (*CLEAR Buckhaven, IYN*)
- Decide how all parties can benefit from linking with each other – environmental and social responsibility policies can provide a good starting point for conversations. Find out who is

RHS BRITAIN IN BLOOM advice sheet

prepared to do what – this includes providing labour, funding and on-going maintenance. Deciding together before the project begins and writing it down helps to establish responsibilities – and ensures that if people move on projects don't become neglected (*Hunmanby in Bloom*)

- Is there an environmental forum that covers your area, as this is where you could go to meet others and possibly attract more funding? (*Grange Park Community Group, IYN*)