



Chapter Best Practices: Corporate Partner Programs

Building and maintaining relationships with Corporate Partners and potential sponsors is a key to driving valuable support for chapter events and initiatives. There are several steps you can take to maximize the value and success of these important partnership programs.

Identifying Chapter Support Opportunities

As a chapter, determine where your greatest needs lie, and how those align with potential support opportunities. From there, craft an annual plan that includes the corporate partner support you will need. Look at these variables in determining your plan:

- What are your Chapter's goals for the coming year, and how can corporate partners help you advance those goals? These might include things like:
 - Hosting Chapter meetings
 - Community service projects
 - New member and student outreach
 - Leadership development programs for chapter volunteers, and more.

Once you identify your goals, you can then identify any appropriate corporate partner support opportunities.

- **Chapter Meetings are often the most high-profile support opportunities for corporate partners, because they can meet members face to face. Look at the types of opportunities you will include that can be supported by corporate partners.** These can include:
 - Speaking engagements
 - Exhibits
 - Refreshment Breaks and/or Meal Functions
 - Provision of Event Space for your meeting(s)
 - Tote Bags
 - Badge Lanyards
 - Program book ads, and more.

Remember that some of this support may be through in-kind donations instead of monetary support, but in-kind donations can significantly help you minimize meeting costs and drive your bottom-line revenue.

- **Set pricing for your sponsorship, advertising, or other support opportunities in alignment with market value.** This can be tricky and may often feel like you are pulling numbers from thin air. Some factors to consider are:
 - What are your costs that need to be covered or partially covered?
 - What kind of additional “reach” will you be giving to partners, that adds value beyond your own costs? Will they be included in event promotions, signage, in the program book, etc.? How many attendees are you expecting, and how does this factor into the value of the experience for the partner? Access to customers is a key value.
 - Have you set a historical precedent with costs, and are those still appropriate, or do they need to be reevaluated? I.E. If you have charged \$250 for a tabletop exhibit at your Chapter meeting in the past, is that price still appropriate when compared against your hard costs plus the promotional value they will receive as an exhibitor? What added value are you providing that helps support the value of your asking price?
- **Create an annual Corporate Partner Support Guide**, which includes all of the various partnership opportunities for which you will solicit support. Have this guide handy in a PDF document to send out annually or as needed to potential partners.

Identifying Corporate Partner Prospects

Once you have identified your annual goals and corporate partner support offerings, it's time to build your prospective partner database. Does your chapter have one? Have the contacts been recently updated? If you don't have one, it is a best practice to build and maintain a list. Here are some suggestions:

- **Start with your existing relationships:** which companies are currently supporting your Chapter, and how are they doing so? Keep a record of each partner's support history, and make sure contact information is up to date.
- **Who's missing from this list?** Vet and build new prospects in the following ways:
 - Survey and/or ask your chapter members for new company leads. Who do they do business with, and do they have contacts they can share?
 - Look at foodservice industry magazines and digital publications to see which companies are advertising in them; which companies are coming out with new products or innovations that they want to introduce to the market.
 - Research other industry events in your area to see which companies are participating;
 - Ask chapter leaders and members to vet new prospects when they attend other food shows or events;
 - Ask your existing corporate partners for ideas on new leads

It's Time to Sell!

Before you ask for a meeting or phone call to solicit support, make sure you have properly researched the company you are calling.

- **Familiarize yourself with the company's products and services**, and think about how your chapter members may be the right fit as customers for them;
- **Have a clear sense of what other organizations they may be supporting or advertising with, and why?** This will help you align your own opportunities to their needs.
- When possible, if the lead has come from one of your members or another corporate partner, **ask them to provide an introduction**, so that you increase the odds of them taking your call or meeting.
- **Approach sponsors during the early fall** to request sponsorship support, as most of them are creating their budgets for the following calendar year at that time. If you learn they are on a different budget cycle, notate that for future timing of sales outreach.

During your first meeting/call with the prospective partner, be sure to include the following:

- **Seek to understand their needs and ask these questions:**
 - **What are their company goals?** Are they bringing new products/services to the market this year? Are they looking to expand to new regions of the country? Are they looking for greater brand immersion with existing products?
 - **What types of foodservice customers/settings are they targeting** (i.e. skilled nursing, acute care, senior living, schools, etc.); once you know this, you can share your related membership profiles to see if they align.
 - **What are their current marketing strategies/goals**, i.e. are they focused on live event marketing, digital marketing campaigns, print advertising, client educational opportunities, in-kind partnerships, or a combination of strategies?
 - **What do they value in a partnership, and how do they measure Return on Investment (ROI)?** This is important, so that you can determine how you can then demonstrate ROI to them.
 - **What is their annual fiscal cycle**, and when is the best time to contact them for annual consideration and inclusion in their marketing budget.
- **Present your chapter's value proposition**, i.e. "Our chapter has over 400 members who are the leaders of foodservice and nutrition operations, managing substantial budgets and purchasing a wide range of products and services such as yours." Have your "elevator speech" ready.

- **Present demographics of chapter membership:**
 - # of members
 - # facility type
 - # of expected members at meeting
 - All upcoming meeting dates/events
- **Explain the various opportunities available to them as a partner and/or discuss just the specific ones you are seeking from this partner.**
 - Have a sales document ready in PDF format that you can send to them for review. Be sure it includes the added value ways they will be acknowledged or marketed to chapter members. (i.e. newsletter, verbal recognition at opening session, walk-in slides, program book/app ad, etc.)
- **Make the ask:** based on what you've learned, ask for their sponsorship, exhibit, advertising, and/or other support in alignment with your chapter's needs and their marketing goals. If they ask for time to consider your request, ask for a date on which you can follow-up with them, and set an appointment accordingly.

Maintaining Successful Partnership Relationships

You've won their support! Once their program has concluded, it's important to remain engaged, and to demonstrate the value of their support.

- **Create a fulfillment document to present to partners post-event that shows the benefits they were promised.** Be sure your document includes all the ways their brand was included in promotions and on-site at events, i.e. Promotion as sponsor in three of our newsletters that reached over 400 members with each distribution; inclusion of your logo and sponsor recognition on our website which averages 1,000 visits per month; etc.
- **Thank sponsors with a personal, hand-written thank you letter following the event.**
- **Reach out and ask how the partnership went for them;** were they happy with their ROI? If not, how can we improve upon it? What suggestions might they have for the next program?
- **Keep in contact throughout the year** and follow-up with any of their questions and requests in a timely manner.
- **Include partners on relevant communications or send them chapter newsletters** to foster long-term relationships.