

partnering
with small to
medium sized
businesses:
a guide for community organisations

Preparing a Community Business Proposal

This tool was jointly written by Social Compass and Transfield Services as a contribution to community organisations that want to develop a community business partnership.

A community business partnership is defined as:

Where one or more businesses and one or more community organisations, having common goals, agree to work together to share and leverage the strengths, resources, talents and knowledge of each other in ways that benefit both the business and the community.

Making contact with a business is the first step in forming a partnership and having a good partnership proposal is the crucial factor in determining a partnership. This Tool is designed to aid community organisations prepare for and develop an effective partnership proposal to present to their 'potential' business partner.

The tool is separate but complementary to the Practical Partnering Toolkit.

When developing and delivering your proposal to a potential partner, remember the following four golden rules:

- >> make sure you can deliver on what you commit to;
- >> do your homework! – Understand your partner;
- >> be passionate about your cause. If you are not then you can not expect anyone else to be; and
- >> realise that you have something of worth to offer the business sector. That is, do not approach your potential partner with cap in hand.

Before you get started

To maximise a successful partnership proposal it will be important that you 'do your homework'.

In preparation, you should consider:

- >> what you want out of a partnership;
- >> what is the most suitable type of partnership;
- >> what type of business will suit such a partnership; and
- >> what you can offer your potential partner.

There are five steps to preparing an effective partnership proposal. This Tool will guide you through each step.

Step One: Self evaluate

A community business partnership is not suitable for all community organisations. Before you write your partnership proposal you must first assess if you are ready and willing to partner with a business and, if so, which type of business is most appropriate for you.

To do this:

- >> consider how a partnership can best help your organisation achieve its mission statement and aims;
- >> identify the kind of business and community benefits that a community business partnership can deliver;
- >> establish what you want out of a partnership and what your organisation can offer a business partner;
- >> scope the support (beyond financial) you would like the business to offer you; and
- >> consider the implications of time and other resources associated with a partnership.

Keep in mind that businesses understand the relationship between community and business well-being and are generally keen to partner with local communities. Understanding 'community' is the core business of community organisations. Businesses is in the business of making profit! However, many businesses now want to make profit in a socially and environmentally sustainable way. Remember that you are the expert in community matters and community well-being. It is your job to initiate creative and exciting ways to partner and your potential business partner will expect this.

Step Two: Determine a partnership arrangement

You will need to develop a proposal you can sell based on something worth partnering on! Do this by figuring out the gaps in your organisation and the things you cannot do yourself (e.g. what are the current challenges that exist in your organisation? Where do you need expertise?).

Within a partnership model there are unlimited variations, – meaning that partners can modify the partnership to suit both the needs of the community and the business. Before you develop your proposal, it is important that you consider and be familiar with the options available to your organisation. Think about which arrangement best suits your organisation and why.

There are two main partnership arrangements:

Partnership Arrangement 1: Where business works with the community organisation to provide financial and human resources to help develop and strengthen the organisation; and/or where the community organisation works with the business to raise its awareness and understanding of the community in which it operates.

Partnership Arrangement 2: Where together partners address a social issue. There are a variety of community concern areas. Some of these include:

- >> addressing homelessness;
- >> working with disadvantaged communities, including Indigenous communities, on issues relating to employment, education, health and/or welfare;
- >> working on an environmental issue; and
- >> addressing youth migration in regional areas.

Step Three: Research potential business partners

At this stage it is critical that you do some homework. Identify the appropriate businesses to enter a partnership with as well as those you would not enter a partnership with. To do this, consider the business sector and business objectives of potential partners. Look for alignment and connection in values/missions, services and products. You can also search for any publications that outline your potential partners approach to community involvement. (For example, search the businesses website and/or sustainability report and local newspaper articles).

It is also important also that you get a sense of the business' objectives. What do they want out of their community engagement programs and partnerships? This will help you prepare your presentation.

After a decision has been made about the business sector that is most suitable to your organisation's size and operations, you need to develop an inventory of businesses within that sector that could be approached for a partnership. You should also identify the most appropriate contact person within each business (e.g. Partnership Manager, Corporate Social Responsibility Manager, Corporate Relations Manager, etc).

Step Four: Preparing your partnership proposal

Your proposal should be short (two pages) and time-specific. Importantly, it should outline expected benefits to your potential partner and to the community of interest. When writing your proposal you should err of the side of something formal and long- term but make sure you can deliver on what you are proposing.

Your proposal should:

- >> describe your organisation (e.g. history, mission, objectives);
- >> present the partnership proposal and arrangement;
- >> outline the anticipated benefits to your partner, to your organisation and to the community you represent;
- >> outline what you want (financial and non-financial resources);
- >> outline what you will do (including what you will do to support your partner);
- >> outline the partnership activities and participation; and
- >> outline next steps.

Make sure you are able to present your organisation's overall purpose, goals and objectives, clearly (i.e. plain language - free of jargon and in plain language). Importantly, make sure your proposal is tailored to the particular business you are approaching (e.g. name the business in your proposal). More and more businesses are looking for ways to engage their staff. This may involve physical labour and/or lending professional support through marketing, IT, accounting and management expertise. When preparing your partnership proposal, consider if your organisation is willing and able to accommodate a volunteering program.

Approaching your potential partner

Making contact with a business is the crucial first step in forming a partnership. Ensure that you are well prepared in order to make a good first and lasting impression.

One of the most effective ways to make contact with business people is informally - through your community network. Consider all the people you already know (e.g. your Board of Directors for example) and try to determine if any of them have an existing relationship with a business. If so, use it!

If you are writing a letter/email or making phone contact, outline your intentions and try to arrange a more formal meeting to present and explore the opportunities for a partnership with that business.

Step Five: Presenting your proposal

Choose one or more members from your organisation that are able to give a good presentation and that have strong interpersonal skills. Make sure this person(s) has:

- >> the enthusiasm and speaking capacity to engage the interest of the business;
- >> enough background of the principles and activities of your organisation, including the proposed partnership project; and
- >> the capability capacity to 'think on their feet'.

Make sure that you are able to clearly outline why you want a partnership with the business and that you present your organisation's overall purpose, goals and objectives.

Develop some key messages that can be clearly understood by the potential business partner and stay on script.

Leave behind information for the business. Make sure this information is presented in a professional manner.

Finally, have your potential business partner commit to the 'next steps' outlined in your proposal and you are on your way!