

Recognizing Your Sponsors

Recognition opportunities at the local level:

- List the names of your donors and sponsors in flyers, event invitations, and other print materials promoting your project. If their gifts vary widely in amount, you can list the largest donors first and you can vary the type size. You may also opt to simply list all donors alphabetically. Avoid listing the specific gift amount.
- List the names of your donors and sponsors in your press releases so that media outlets will know your community's involvement with your project.
- List the names of your donors and sponsors on signage at events related to your project.
- Purchase a print advertisement or write a letter to the editor at your local newspaper thanking your sponsors and donors.
- Thank your sponsors when you give a speech or an interview.
- Invite your sponsors and donors to special events during the course of your project and/or when it is complete . . . nothing beats a personal thank you!
- Send your sponsors and donors a post-project thank you. Include photos and other materials and be sure to let them know the outcomes and impacts of your efforts – they will love to hear how they helped to make your success possible!

A couple of tips:

- Be sure to ask your donors and sponsors how they want to be recognized – EXACTLY how they want to be recognized. How do they wish their name or business name to appear or, do they want it to appear at all?
- Some donors prefer to keep their gifts anonymous – be sure to respect their wishes.
- Be sure to check and double check your spelling – make sure what you print is 100% correct!

Corporate sponsors are the backbone to any charity event. Without their support there would be no event. Therefore, it is essential that you give your sponsors the proper recognition they deserve. Here is a list of easy ways to recognize sponsors at your next charity event:

- **Program**
Including sponsors' logos in your event program is easy and does not cost anything if you are already printing a program. Feature the presenting sponsor prominently on the cover. List all the sponsors on a sponsor thank you page towards the beginning of the program rather than the back. By thanking them in the earlier pages it will show just how much you value their support. In addition to listing the sponsors include a thank you note to them written by the event organizer or the president of the organization. It will make the thank you seem more personal and genuine.
- **Nametags**
If you have nametags at your event include your presenting sponsor's logo in the bottom corner. This is another great way to recognize your sponsors and not have to spend a penny.
- **Napkins**
If you are hosting a cocktail party, purchase napkins personalized with your sponsor's logo. Personalized napkins are surprisingly not that expensive; personalized cocktail napkins can be purchased for as little as \$7.50 per 50 pack. Give the napkins to the bartender to use when handing out drinks, stack some on cocktail tables, and place them near the appetizer table.

Guests will be surprised by your attention to detail and your sponsors will be delighted with all the recognition you are giving them.

- **Centerpieces**

If your event involves tables, most likely you will have centerpieces. Use the centerpieces as an opportunity to thank your sponsors. If you like candles, imprint your sponsor's logo on the votive. If you prefer flowers put the company's logo on the vase. You can also incorporate something that represents the company into the actual floral arrangement. For example, I attended an event sponsored by Goodyear; they placed a balloon Goodyear blimp among the flowers.

- **Gobos**

Gobos project light in a pattern. You can get gobos made in the shape of your sponsor's logo and project the image in your event's dining room, check in area, or even on the front of the building for a dramatic effect. Gobos are a very elegant way to recognize your sponsors.

- Other ways I have seen sponsors recognized at an event:

- company logos imprinted on lamp shades
- gift bags and giveaways with sponsor's logo
- logos on beach balls at a fashion show at a resort's pool
- red carpet picture backdrop with company logos
- Figuring out ways to thank your sponsors does not have to be stressful and expensive. Think about things you will already have at your event and see if you can add your sponsor's logo to them. Your sponsors will love all the recognition and be begging to sponsor next year's event!

Social media recognition:

- Online logo placement. Many corporate sponsors pay because they're interested in showing they support the community or are aligned with your cause. The more places you can put their logo, the happier they are. Don't rule out any online page or email, including your website's homepage, the registration or sign-up page for what they're sponsoring, online white papers or reports, your Facebook page or emails to your community.

You can create levels offering different logo placement options. For example, where on the page is it placed? Does it link to their website? Is there a description about what they do or just a logo?

- Online ads. To go even further, you could offer a graphic banner or box ad on your website or in your eNews. Ads don't have to seem like obvious, blatant "advertising" unrelated to your cause. Consider those that show how excited sponsors are to be part of the event and how their missions overlap with yours.
- Visual branding. Designing such key communications as emails to your list, or a sign-up page, using a sponsor's corporate colors, fonts and other branding elements can draw a strong connection between them and the event. If the nature of your website makes it difficult to incorporate someone else's brand, consider creating a micro-site. It is simply a small, separate site just for the event.

- Naming rights. To take the idea of sponsor recognition to the logical extreme, think about the possibility of naming rights. This happens on a large scale all the time, look at college bowl games, or NASCAR races for examples. It can be effective on a small scale, too. Is there an online community, online auction, report or other communication piece you could name or re-name for a sponsor? For example, the “Colgate Minnesota Kids Dental Health Update,” could be part of your annual kids health campaign. If your sponsor is sufficiently enthusiastic, they might even fund a useful new online community-building piece.
- Employee perks. Many companies are seeking opportunities or perks to give their employees. You could provide online information or service for which you normally charge for. The employer could give their employees free online courses, reports, or a newsletter. You might even provide conference calls with experts, or provide an online “salon” format that lets people speak with celebrities or others interested in your cause.
- Social media promotion. Don’t forget the possibility of using your social media channels to recognize your sponsors. You could include a commitment to write about your partnership. For example, you could agree to mention them in one blog post, twice on Facebook and four times on Twitter.
- Sponsor guest posting. If your organization has a blog, you could offer sponsors a guest post about something cause-related that overlaps with your mission. You could hold a contest to find the employee who’s most enthusiastic about your cause and then hand them the reins of your Twitter feed or Facebook page for a day.
- Videos and photos about the partnership. Multimedia can be a compelling way to recognize sponsors. Consider a photo with key staff members from your sponsor’s company, or a video interview. If they provide a branded banner or sign, you could use it for a backdrop. If you’re hosting a live event, take pictures of participants in front of it and post them on your Facebook page or with your event photos.
- Let them provide real-time information. More and more nonprofits are creating live webcasts or Twitter streams during conferences, speakers or galas. If this makes sense for you, it presents another opportunity for sponsorship or even naming rights. For example, American Express could provide the official, branded webcast of a compelling presentation given by an expert on your cause, or assign an employee to be the official-provider of live Tweets or blog posts.
- Introduce them to your list with an email. Consider introducing a large sponsor, or one particularly well aligned with your mission, in an email to your community. You could explain the things they offer that might be of benefit, or offer more general outreach on their behalf. Be careful with this technique, though. Make sure you’re not sending emails that are blatant advertisements without any value for your list members. You risk alienating the constituents who signed up to hear specifically about your cause.

- Offer opt-ins for information from your sponsor. If participants are registering for your event or publication or providing you with information online, offer them the opportunity to sign up for emails from your sponsor.

For instance, if you're asking people to sign a petition to save your local theater, offer the chance to opt-in for a newsletter of art events published by the local paper. You would provide the sponsor with a list of names and email addresses from those who opted-in. Many companies are eager to build their email lists and compelling opt-ins can be an effective way to do it, making this an item for big-ticket sponsors.

It's not likely that all of these methods will make sense for your organization, so pick and choose those that do, but be sure to weigh the fundraising potential of sponsorship against the risk of jeopardizing your relationship with the rest of your community.

- Seek a balance. Plastering every webpage and email with sponsors' ads might raise money for your organization, but it's also liable to diminish your credibility with constituents and other funders. With a little thought, you might discover opportunities to define online perks that raise sponsorship dollars, advance your cause, and maybe even provide some online activities you would not be able.