

The Nonprofit's

GUIDE TO PITCHING TO CORPORATE SPONSORS



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Introduction

The right corporate sponsorship can have a massive impact on your organization. In addition to providing another source of income, a company's participation in your fundraising campaigns and events connects your work to their supporters and customers, gaining you new exposure and powerful brand association.

Corporations may be the ones contributing to an organization, but sponsorships are actually a two-way street. Just as any healthy relationship is dependent on clear expectations and mutual participation, corporate sponsorships require effort from both partners.

In this guide, we've compiled everything you need to understand the most appropriate type of sponsorships for your organizations and what it takes to find and secure an effective relationship—no matter the size of your team.

Let's get started.

Chapter 1

Sponsorship Benefits and Types

Corporate sponsorships typically provide nonprofit organizations with financial support in exchange for the corporation's brand exposure. Beyond this basic exchange, there are several additional benefits for each party in the relationship.

NONPROFIT BENEFITS:

- Bolster your marketing efforts and increase exposure
- Acquire new supporters
The 2013 Cone Communications Social Impact Study reported that *"79 percent of shoppers would donate to a charity supported by a trusted business."*¹
- Cement your brand's association with certain qualities and ideals
- Legitimize your brand in the eyes of potential supporters

CORPORATION BENEFITS:

- Improved perception as a brand that gives back
- Exposure to potential new clientele
- Opportunities to win over customers from competing brands
The 2015 Cone Communications/Ebiquity Global CSR Study reported that *"90 percent of U.S. consumers say they would switch brands to one associated with a cause, given comparable price and quality."*²
- Higher consumer willingness to pay
According to a recent Nielsen study, *55 percent of online consumers would pay more for product or service offerings when a company is associated with social impact.*³
- Employee satisfaction
The same Nielsen study cited that when deciding where to work, *67 percent of employees would rather work for an organization that was socially responsible.*⁴

¹ Cone Communications, "2013 Cone Communications Social Impact Study." <http://www.conecomm.com>

² Cone Communications, "2015 Cone Communications/Ebiquity Global CSR Study." <http://www.conecomm.com/2015-global-csr-study>

³ Nielsen, "Global Consumers Are Willing to Put Their Money Where Their Heart is When It Comes to Goods and Services from Companies Committed to Social Responsibility." <http://www.nielsen.com/us/en/press-room/2014/global-consumers-are-willing-to-put-their-money-where-their-heart-is.html>

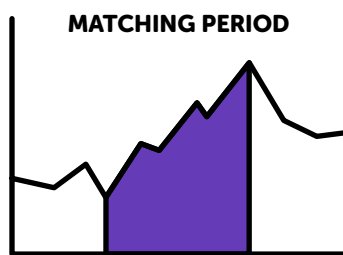
⁴ Ibid.

Types of Sponsorships

Sponsorships, and your relationships with corporations, can take many forms. Understand the key differences between types in order to best assess which ones will be most strategic for your organization and your development goals.

LARGE FINANCIAL GIFTS AND MATCHING CAMPAIGNS

It's important to first understand the distinction between a large financial gift made as a donation, and a sponsorship that is expected to generate a return of some kind. A financial gift qualifies a corporation for certain tax benefits, whereas sponsorship funding with expected returns (such as increased visibility and brand recognition) is considered a form of taxable advertising and is consequently subject to unrelated business-income tax, or UBIT. Expected returns can also include things like an increased number of customers for the corporation by way of the event or relationship.



Large gifts are powerful means of support for your nonprofit organization and can be strategically leveraged for a matching campaign. This fundraising strategy uses a large gift to encourage additional gifts in a time-based initiative and in essence, doubles the impact of a corporation's contribution.

CAMPAIGN AND CAUSE MARKETING

An increasingly common business strategy, this type of sponsorship involves a financial contribution in exchange for brand recognition and exposure. These relationships, though perhaps not as return-driven as a traditional business-to-business transaction, are very much an investment on the corporation's part as they expect positive gains in some fashion. Whether their goal is to increase their brand exposure, improve their brand image, increase their social following, or sell additional product, they enter the relationship looking to meet a certain goal in exchange for their funding. These contributions are taxable since your recognition of their branding is considered a form of advertising.

IN-KIND SPONSORSHIP

Instead of financial contributions, some corporations prefer to provide sponsorships for nonprofit organizations in the form of physical goods, services, or expertise. Not all in-kind donations are tax-deductible. For example, you generally cannot write off the value of your contributed time or services as a gift. To understand whether a corporation can write off their donation, they should refer to the appropriate IRS documentation.⁵



TIME & SERVICES



GOODS & PRODUCTS



UNDERWRITING

Examples of in-kind sponsorship include:

- Staff members' time, services, or expertise
- Goods, such as a product
- Underwriting for a specific part of an event—underwriting typically offers the corporation lower brand visibility⁶

While a less flexible form of contribution, in-kind gifts are a great way to create a physical connection between your organization and a corporation. In many cases, in-kind donations come from local organizations. Be sure to keep a pulse on the businesses in your area who may be willing to work with you due to ease of proximity.

⁵ IRS, "Publication 526 Charitable Contributions." <https://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/p526.pdf>

⁶ Raise-Funds, "Sponsorships and Underwriting Campaigns: Would You Please Fund Our...?" <http://www.raise-funds.com/1999/sponsorships-and-underwriting-campaigns-would-you-please-fund-our/>

EMPLOYEE GIVING AND VOLUNTEER PROGRAMS

Many corporations seek to engage their employees by offering them opportunities to give back.

These workplace giving programs demonstrate an organization's values and company culture and also provide a simple way for team members to get involved with a nonprofit's mission. Some common types of employee giving programs include:

- Automatic payroll deductions
- Employee peer-to-peer fundraising
- Volunteer hours, volunteer time off

Volunteer hours, specifically, can also serve as a team-building exercise for a corporation's staff to come together and develop their inter- or cross-departmental relationships.

Large contributions, campaign and cause marketing relationships, in-kind donations, and employee giving and volunteer programs are all methods of support your organization can seek to acquire. Yet the more complex nature of campaign and cause marketing relationships warrants a deeper dive. The next chapters will focus on event and campaign sponsorships in which the corporation expects to generate a return of some kind. As partnerships between the nonprofit and for-profit world continue to form in efforts to tackle social challenges from all sides, this type of sponsorship has become increasingly relevant and a vital component of collective social impact.

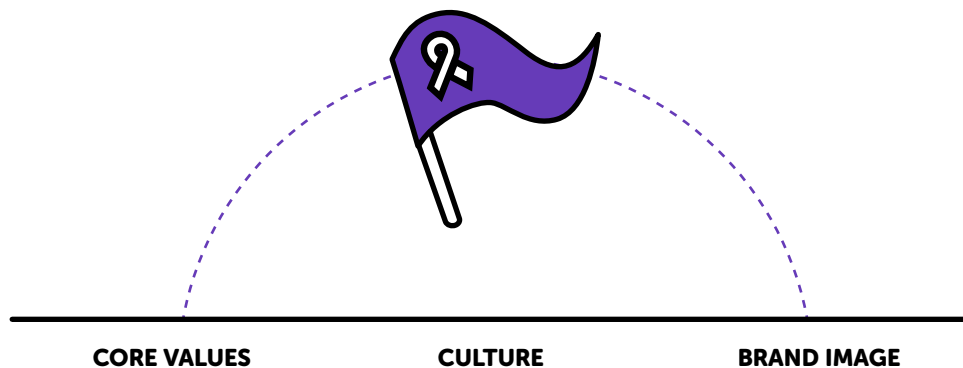
Chapter 2

Square One: Self-Awareness

Once you've decided which types of sponsorships you'd like to pursue, the first step will be to have a deep understanding of your own organization, its capacity, and its mission. You need to have a strong sense of your own goals and assets in order to a) choose a compatible partner and b) prepare a clear value proposition for them. Identify and articulate the following things.

Your Core Values, Culture, and Brand

Successful partnerships hinge on an alignment of organizational core values, culture, and brand image. In order to find businesses that will be a good match, you first need to be able to clearly articulate these details about your own organization to corporations.



If your team has never had any formal discussions about your core values and organizational culture, that will be a necessary step—to talk. Bring your team together and use their insights to understand how they define your culture and what's important to your mission. If this unearths any surprises, use this opportunity to course-correct and communicate your leadership team's goals.

Your Target Demographic and Reach

Your organization's audience is one of its most valuable assets. The more you know about them, the easier it will be to explain their value to potential sponsors. Make sure you know the following details about your supporters before you seek out relationships with corporations:

- Size of your reach via email, social media, and direct mail
- Average attendance/participation rate of your previous campaigns, projected attendance/participation with sponsorship
- Social demographics of your audience: sex, education, age, geography, income, nationality, ethnicity

Apart from your organization's core beliefs and reach, you also have another secret weapon: the traits that set you apart from other organizations. When you can communicate the details that make you unique, you strengthen your offering as a potential partner. Consider similar organizations in your space within the nonprofit industry and answer the following questions:

- How do your programs differ from those at other nonprofits?
- Is your operational approach different in some way?
- What's at stake? What would happen if your organization didn't exist?

Charina Lumley, COO at Movemeant Foundation—a nonprofit organization that works to empower young women to build self-confidence and positive body image through physical movement—cites their business approach as what sets them apart from other organizations also seeking sponsorships.

“ *I think what gives us a little bit of an edge is that [corporations] understand that we’re very business-minded ourselves. We do talk a lot about mission, but we also talk a lot about return.*”

– **CHARINA LUMLEY**, COO of Movemeant

After you’ve taken the steps to better understand your position and value as a potential sponsorship partner, your next step will be to research and identify corporations to approach.

Chapter 3

Find Like-Minded Organizations

To secure a sponsorship that will resonate with your audience and develop into a lasting relationship, you need to consider corporations in and out of your network that share similar values and missions.

Some connections will be easier to draw than others, but you shouldn't stop at the obvious. For example, say you work at a food bank. A large grocery chain might be the first type of corporation to cross your mind as you consider potential sponsors. But less obvious connections are also viable options if they share similar core values and goals. Perhaps a local gas and electric company is committed to reducing rates of homelessness and would like to associate their brand with combating this issue. If you don't research different types of corporations and their potential connections to your vision, you leave potential funding on the table.

When you take the time to find a good fit, you not only make your pitch more attractive to the corporation, you also safeguard your organization's reputation. An ill-fitted match could damage the public perception of your brand and have long-term negative repercussions.

For example, in 2010, the Kentucky Fried Chicken's sponsorship of the Susan G. Komen organization stirred controversy. It was unclear to many how the two were connected. In fact, the relationship seemed downright contradictory. Foods high in fat such as fried chicken are associated with increasing the risk of developing the very disease the Susan G. Komen organization fights.⁷



⁷ Altnet, "The Top 5 Most Hypocritical Corporate Sponsorships." <http://www.altnet.org/economy/top-5-most-hypocritical-corporate-sponsors>

While it can be tempting to pursue any and every corporate sponsorship possible, the long-term health and success of your organization is dependent on your supporters and their impression of your work and methods. To protect and nurture your reputation, carefully consider which corporations align with your mission and values. These will also likely be the ones most willing to participate.

Research and Networking

In addition to exploring your personal connections and fostering any existing relationships with corporations, you should also keep a pulse on industry news and trends. By staying in tune with the for-profit world, you will be more prepared to approach them in a way that is well-informed. Your research will allow you to keep abreast of certain corporations and better understand their interests. Charina at Movemeant speaks to how she stays in the know when it comes to researching potential sponsors in the corporate world.

“ *I did a ton of research. I subscribe to a lot of different newsletters, business newsletters, journals just to keep up with the industry and sometimes beyond to keep up with what brands are doing and to stay on the cutting edge.*”

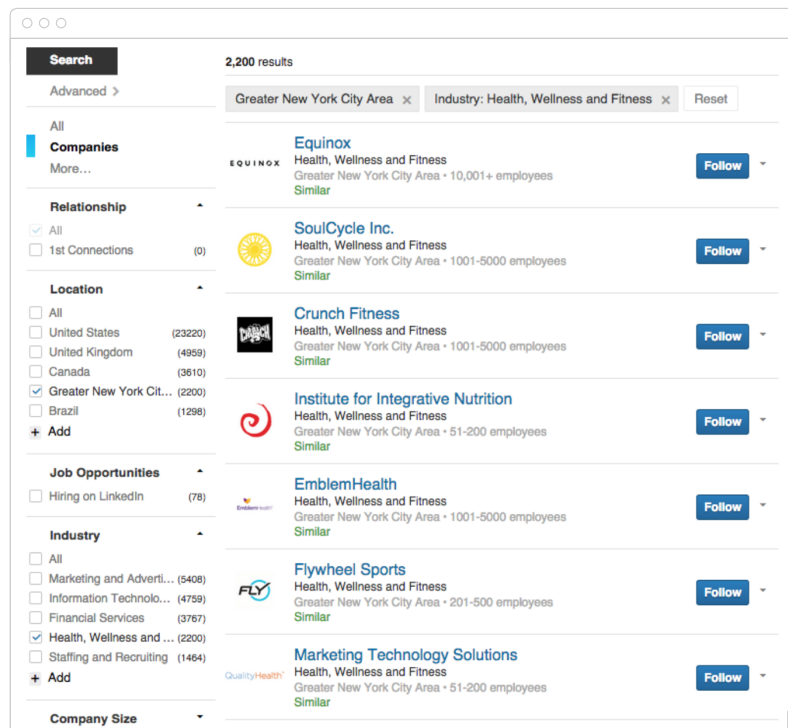
– **CHARINA LUMLEY**, COO of *Movemeant*

For example, as Charina recently considered reaching out to Under Armour, an American sports clothing company, she used information she had collected in the news to modify her approach. She knew they had launched a commercial featuring women’s gymnastics and therefore decided to suggest sponsoring their gymnastics programs, rather than presenting them with an opportunity to sponsor a soccer or lacrosse program.

As you create your list of potential partners, don't forget to keep an eye on organizations in your geographic vicinity.

An Indiana University Lilly Family School of Philanthropy study reported that “between 2000 and 2011, 60 percent of donations over \$1 million went to organizations that were in the donor’s immediate geographic area.”⁸

Apart from simple online research, you can also identify corporations who might be interested in sponsoring your organization through LinkedIn’s advanced search options. Narrow your scope by identifying fields like location and industry.



These LinkedIn search results indicate companies that are in the Greater New York City Area in the health, wellness, and fitness industry.

⁸ Indiana University—Purdue University Indianapolis, “A Decade of Million-Dollar Gifts.” https://philanthropy.iupui.edu/files/research/report_w_appendix_april_2013.pdf

The Right Person at the Right Time

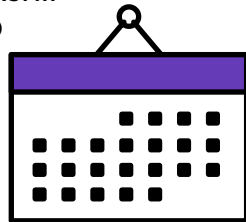
The process of securing a sponsorship can span several months. The sooner you can identify the sponsorship decision maker at the corporation, the sooner you can move the process forward and secure the funding you need.

One technique to reach the decision maker is to cast your net and reach out to as many people as possible. Charina refers to this tactic as “the hustle.”

“I sent the same deck, the same email with slight variation, to six people in the company—one in finance, one in marketing, one in product, etc. Eventually it landed on the decision maker’s desk about four times and they’re like, ‘Okay, I have to call them back because it’s landed on my desk so many different times.’ You have to talk about everything all the time to everybody.” – Charina, COO Movemeant

**THE AVERAGE
\$100,000 SPONSORSHIP
CAN TAKE AROUND**

**6 – 9
MONTHS
TO ARRANGE.**



Timing can also make or break your sponsorship opportunity. The average \$100,000 sponsorship can take around 6 to 9 months to arrange.⁹ Start nurturing your connections as soon as you’ve planned your campaign goals to avoid losing precious time.

The time of year, specifically, is also something you should keep in mind as you’re reaching out. Many corporations make sponsorship decisions in the last quarter of the year. In fact, because they make decisions for their sponsorship plans for the next year at the end of the previous, you can use this to your advantage by offering a menu of sponsorship options.

For example, if you know your nonprofit will be running a spring 5K, hosting a fall gala, and running a #GivingTuesday campaign, present them with multiple options for engagement and sponsorships so that they can choose the events or campaigns most aligned with their marketing objectives.

⁹ Biz Bash, “Selling Sponsorships: How to Craft a Perfect Pitch.” <http://www.bizbash.com/selling-sponsorships-how-to-craft-a-perfect-pitch/new-york/story/6778/#.VyfDuZNVhBc>

Outreach

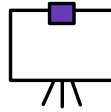
While there exists no one “correct” method to communicate with corporations throughout this pursuit, standard conversations tend to evolve in the following order:



**INITIAL
CONTACT**



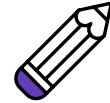
PITCH DECK



PRESENTATION



**PROPOSAL
SUBMISSION**



FOLLOW-UP

1. Initial email or call
2. Pitch deck/value proposition submission
3. In-person or virtual meeting/presentation
4. Submission of specific proposal, catered to potential partner’s needs/objectives
5. Follow-up

The key to navigating interactions with your contacts at a company is to remember that you’re presenting them with a business opportunity. To sustain their attention, you need to create communications materials designed with their goals in mind.

Chapter 4

How and What to Prepare

When you start your outreach, you'll want to be prepared ahead of time in case a conversation picks up steam. The more prepared you are during the dialogue, the better impression you'll leave. A well-orchestrated and thoughtful presentation can also help you get past the corporation's gatekeeper and reach the decision maker sooner.

Your Slide Deck

While you always want to tailor your pitch and materials for specific contacts, you should first create a brief, general slide deck you can use to pitch to corporations when you first reach out. This deck will tell your organization's story and mission, and it should also convey an overall sense of the how sponsoring your organization will benefit the business and what the partnership could look like.

"The goal of any pitch deck is to make it look super polished with very few words. No one is going to sign a six-figure deal off of the deck. They're going to sign a six-figure deal because you got into their office and you sold something in person." – Charina, COO Movemeant

“ *The goal of any pitch deck is to make it look super polished with very few words.*”

– **CHARINA LUMLEY**, COO of Movemeant

Dig Deeper—Establish the Corporation’s Priorities

After you’ve reached out and sent your initial materials, if the corporation is interested, they’ll want to learn more about the opportunity.

To articulate how you can solve their goals, you will first want to complete a discovery conversation that explores what they’re looking for. Ask questions like:

- What are they looking to get out of the relationship?
- What goals and objectives would this sponsorship support?
- How would they measure the success of the sponsorship?
- What can your organization provide that would create a return on this investment for them?

Beyond their interests and the usage of their name and funds, these conversations will typically also discuss numerical goals for brand visibility and the potential for exposure.

If you’ve had successful sponsorship relationships in the past, this is the time to demonstrate what past involvement with your organization looked like for other corporations, and indicate the rewards they reaped from the investment. Be as specific here as possible and speak to things like:

- Number of people exposed to the brand
- Number of products/services/brand paraphernalia distributed
- Social media engagement
- Increased email subscription list

After you have a clear sense of what is important to the corporation, you can create a personalized presentation and report specific to their goals.

Your focus throughout this process should be on your prospective partner, and what your organization can provide them in exchange for their support. Consider pursuing a sponsorship like a job interview. You make initial contact, have a phone interview, get to know each other and your separate goals, and then you have the feature event—your main interview in which you need to prove your value to the employer—that you can bring something to the table that will generate a positive return on their investment.

Your Catered Presentation/Report Materials

When you advance beyond a discovery call and reach this stage in the process, it's important to continue to meet the corporation on their own turf and communicate in a way that resonates with them.

To do this, keep in mind that you're talking to a business. They're accustomed to pitches that are results-driven. When it comes down to it, you're taking up this organization's time, so you need to make it clear immediately why this relationship is going to be valuable.

Part of your delivery will inherently involve speaking about your organization's story. You should strive to tell your story in way that sparks emotion but also conveys value. To keep the focus on the corporation's goals and key results, you should include the following in your proposal:¹⁰



¹⁰ Practical Sponsorship Ideas, "10 Essential Steps to Create a Winning Sponsorship."
<http://practicalsponsorshipideas.com/blog/31-create-a-winning-sponsorship-proposal>

SPONSORSHIP VALUE PROPOSITION

A value proposition clearly communicates what makes your organization an attractive investment. According to Pulse Marketing, a unique value proposition, or UVP, should convey three things: who, what, and why.¹¹

- Who are you?
- What does your organization do?
- Why should a corporation sponsor you? Why should this matter to them?

How you answer question three, in particular, is key, as it is where you convey what the potential return will be on the corporation's investment. While you can paint a general picture of the opportunity in your initial conversations, the more specific you can be about the return as it relates to the corporation's goals, the better. To do this, it can be helpful to first walk through the other key deliverables you'll need to present.

MARKETING INITIATIVES

Convey a clear picture of how a partnership could boost the company's visibility by providing specific, co-branded examples.

Create mockups or provide prior examples of the following: email appeals, social media posts, video content, testimonials, ideas for partner-focused hashtags, and other locations their name/logo would appear.

¹¹ Pulse Marketing Agency, "How to Craft a Unique Value Proposition for Your Nonprofit." <http://pulsemarketingagency.com/how-to-craft-a-unique-value-proposition-for-your-non-profit-organization/>

CAMPAIGN PAGES

If the corporation has agreed to circulate your fundraising page in some fashion or participate in an employee giving program, you will want to provide a pre-designed campaign page in addition to any marketing assets. This page will display their logo and any other assets outlined in your agreement. When you build these assets ahead of time, you make a smooth transition to “hand over the reins” and avoid extra work on part of the corporation. Through Classy’s software, this transfer can be completed quickly by adding others as campaign administrators. Marketing assets and a ready-to-go page will empower the corporation and their employees to get off the ground running right away.

SUCCESS MEASURES

To set clear expectations, include details on what metrics you’ll monitor to determine if the sponsorship relationship is successful. Provide details around the following areas in this section:

- The key results that will be monitored throughout your campaign
- How you plan to debrief/assess if the relationship has proven fruitful for both parties

A CALL TO ACTION

The last component of your pitch should be a clear call to action. By this point, the corporation should have an understanding of what exactly your organization is asking for and feel like they have enough information to decide how to move forward.

CONTRACT DETAILS

As your conversations progress after your initial pitch deck, you’ll need to write a contract and have a lawyer review your agreement to ensure it best represents the interests of both parties involved. You’ll also want to include information about specifics such as event insurance within this section.

Chapter 5

Nail the Pitch

Your pitch deck has the power to land you an in-person presentation, and an in-person presentation and well-written proposal have the power to land you the deal. So once you're meeting a prospective partner in person, how do you ensure that what you have to say and deliver will be meaningful to the corporation?

You Need to Have Presence

While your materials are essential, your presence and delivery matter just as much. Amy Cuddy, renowned social psychologist, lecturer, and Harvard professor, speaks to the importance of effective communications in presentations in her book, *Presence*. Interested in the effect of an individual's "presence" on their ability to secure funding when pitching to venture capitalists, she presents a summary of her findings informed by venture capitalists themselves.



Amy Cuddy, renowned social psychologist, lecturer, and Harvard professor, speaks to the importance of effective communications in presentations.

¹² Amazon, "Presence: Bringing Your Boldest Self to Your Biggest Challenges." <http://www.amazon.com/Presence-Bringing-Boldest-Biggest-Challenges/dp/0316256579>

Through her years of research, she determined that venture capitalists look for specific qualities as they are being presented to in order to choose between multiple viable business opportunities. Successful presenters tend to exhibit the following:¹²

- They buy what they're selling. It's easy to see they truly believe in the merit of their idea and proposal.
- They aren't so focused on making a good impression that it detracts from the presentation of their pitch. There isn't a feeling of "brown-nosing," but rather a determination to best represent their idea.
- They're not too high-energy, defensive, or aggressive in their approach.
- They don't convey blind faith, but rather an ability to acknowledge that not having all of the answers is part of the process.
- They may display signs of nervousness, which, when kept in check, can be positive as it can indicate their passion.

“ *The strongest predictor of who got the money was not the person’s credentials or the content of the pitch. The strongest predictors of who got the money were these traits: confidence, comfort level, and passionate enthusiasm.*”

– **AMY CUDDY**, *Presence: Bringing Your Boldest Self to Your Biggest Challenges*

¹² Amazon, "Presence: Bringing Your Boldest Self to Your Biggest Challenges." <http://www.amazon.com/Presence-Bringing-Boldest-Biggest-Challenges/dp/0316256579>

Often cited as one of the average American’s top phobias, public speaking can be an incredibly challenging skill to master.¹² Cuddy recognizes the anxiety many of us face and suggests there are certain small steps individuals can take to change their frame of mind and improve their performance. Her research explores the power of physical body language on the mind, and it indicates that we all possess the ability to change our thoughts and emotions through our body positioning.



Examples of high power poses (top row) vs. low power poses (bottom row).
Images courtesy of Amy Cuddy, Harvard University.

According to her research and that of her colleagues, standing or sitting in “power poses”—such as the ones in the top row of this image—for two minutes straight is all it takes to feel more powerful in a situation. Practice power poses to mentally center yourself before giving a pitch.

¹² Wilkinson College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences, “America’s Top Fears 2015.” <https://blogs.chapman.edu/wilkinson/2015/10/13/americas-top-fears-2015/>

In addition to completing poses before your pitch, there are also a few things Cuddy recommends to keep in mind as you complete your presentation:

- **Maintain good posture.** Keep your shoulders back and your chin level, and sit and stand up straight.
- **Control your breathing** and don't be afraid to slow down or pause.
- **Occupy more space.** Use open body postures, move around, and try to incorporate hand gestures or props.
- **Don't let a mistake trip you up.** Use your posture to pull you out of any negative feelings in the moment. For example, Cuddy recommends pulling your shoulders back to prevent yourself from emotionally collapsing inward.

Prepare, Don't Memorize

The other key to a successful pitch?

Knowing more about your topic than anyone else in the room.

True preparedness doesn't come from memorization, or your ability to stick to a script and recite the perfect string of thoughts. It comes from a deep understanding of subject matter. To nail the pitch, focus less on your exact wording and more on the concepts and ideas you're speaking around.

When you prepare this way, you reduce the chance of having anxiety during the presentation due to any deviations that might occur during your pitch. You're comfortable because you're informed, and less worried about what comes next and more focused on delivering all of the information in an honest and genuine way.

Conclusion

You've explored your own organization's goals and values, done your research, and approached and met with potential corporations. What's left? Your follow-up.

Just as with a job interview, it's essential to touch base afterwards and thank the corporation for their time and offer to address any questions they may have. Remember that you, not the corporation, are responsible for driving the relationship forward.

Dedication to a strategic corporate sponsorship approach will ensure a higher success rate as your nonprofit pursues these high-value relationships. Nurture your relationships with organizations aligned with your goals and values, and you will identify partners that have the potential to grow beyond one campaign or event. Mutually beneficial sponsorships have the power to elevate both of your brands and evolve into a long-term professional agreement. This can cut the time and energy needed to undergo the sponsorship search process campaign after campaign.

You've read the need-to-know on corporate sponsorships. Now it's time to put it all into action. Strike your best power pose, and get out there and prove that your organization is not only deserving of sponsorship dollars, but that you understand how these relationships impact both sides of the coin and take everyone to the next level.



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