

5 Ways To Connect More Easily With Potential Chapter Sponsors



Your board knows that dues alone aren't enough to keep your association chapter going, so there's a good chance that finding a few good ways to increase your chapter's revenue has been on the chapter's To Do list for a while. That focus, in addition to ways to bring in new members and keep the ones you have, should include finding non-dues revenue streams. This additional chapter revenue will let you continue to provide members and member guests with all the great programming you're known for and could even help add more services.



Association chapter sponsors are a great way to add revenue. There's a good chance someone has brought up the topic in more than a few chapter board meetings; however, it's probably not something your board members or your general membership has shown interest in. When you finally have time to explore the reasons behind their disinterest, you learn the truth—contacting strangers is not something many people are comfortable doing.

If you can't find chapter sponsors just by asking your members if their businesses want to sponsor the chapter, you need a better plan. Here are some ways to make bringing in chapter sponsors something your board and your members more willing, and more comfortable, doing.

What is a chapter sponsorship program?

An association chapter sponsorship program is a structured initiative that asks organizations, typically businesses or corporations to provide financial or in-kind support to a chapter. The sponsoring company pays a fee, often yearly, for the sponsorship. In return they get more visibility with your membership, through things like speaking at events and having their logo and links to their websites on chapter materials.

That visibility can lead to increased connections and the chance for business between your members and that organization, which is a win-win for both members and the sponsor.

Making it easier for volunteers to connect with potential sponsors

You may not realize that talking to companies about your chapter's sponsorship program and getting them to commit can require good selling skills. The person asking for the sponsorship needs to be able to share the benefits of sponsorship versus the cost in ways that make the potential sponsor say yes.

Most likely, the person presenting this opportunity to the sponsor isn't a salesperson, unless your chapter happens to be for salespeople! That person may not know what to say, or the best way to say it, to have the right impact. Many people don't like to ask people for things that cost money, whether they know the person or not, even if that conversation is around the benefits of connecting with your chapter (which they are already connected to and feel strongly about).

To make the act of engaging sponsors smoother and more effective for everyone, the process needs to be comfortable and enjoyable for the person doing the selling. Here are five ideas that can help improve how all your members talk about your chapter and your sponsorship program.

1. **Provide the tools to make reaching out less stressful.** In addition to providing talking points about the specifics of the sponsorship program – what it includes, the costs, the benefits of sponsorship, etc. – give them ideas for presenting those benefits appropriately. Showing them what to say and how to say it can make the difference between a yes and a no. You might want to hold a training session to cover basic sales techniques, like building relationships, assessing needs, handling objections and closing.
2. **Make it fun.** Who doesn't like the chance to win a prize? Enter members who bring in new sponsors in a certain timeframe into a drawing. And make the prize something that has an impact, like admission to your largest conference or a meet and greet with an upcoming speaker.



3. **Make getting a “no” the actual goal.** Why would you want someone to try to get potential sponsors to say no? As odd as it sounds, changing this focus removes some of the stress that comes with asking; this shift can lead to more of the outcomes you’re looking for. Rather than being worried the person will say no, they’ll be excited to hear it. This decrease in stress often leads to increased confidence, which comes across in the conversation. And that increased confidence can lead to hearing “yes” more often.
4. **Focus on the activity, not the outcome.** Another way to reframe a person’s thinking and increase their confidence is by letting them know you’re interested in what they’re saying and how often they say it, rather than the number of sponsors they bring in. Ask your members to contact a certain number of prospective sponsors; let them know that their goal is to just share the message of the chapter and the idea of sponsorship with X number of people. Even if every person they talk to says no, they will have accomplished that objective. And, even with a “no,” they’ll have made a connection, which will make it easier to contact the person again in the future to follow up, and work toward the “yes.”
5. **Switch leads with another person.** Rather than having people contact people they know, have them develop a list of potential sponsors and trade that list with another person in the chapter. Because they’re not contacting their own leads, they aren’t emotionally attached to them. This shift makes it much less nerve-wracking to pick up the phone or send that email.

Give your members the help they need to be less stressed about making calls and sending emails asking for sponsors. When the focus moves from selling sponsorships to building relationships and sharing the chapter message, members become a lot more comfortable, and those elusive yesses become a whole lot easier to get.

