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developing long term business community relationships

Long term partnerships between businesses and community organisations are highly effective, but can be difficult to establish and manage.

Pros and cons

For community organisations...

Establishing a long-term relationship offers a sound base for budgeting and planning. It provides an opportunity to set your relationship with a business in a strategic context, to maximise the benefits. Identifying and approaching a new business partner is a resource intensive and uncertain process. Long-term relationships, therefore, provide a greater return on the initial time invested.

Through the relationship new ways of working in partnership with a business can be explored. Building a relationship with employees of the business takes your message to a wider audience and develops a new stakeholder group.

Like all partnerships, a long-term relationship with a business can, however, be demanding and will require a concerted effort to maintain it effectively.

For businesses...

Long-term relationships provide a business with the opportunity to assess the benefits of its support. Staff have time to develop a sense of ownership of these benefits, engendering a deeper sense of pride and achievement than would come from one off or short term support. This can also significantly increase the number of employees who become involved in your programme.

Once established the track record will show the value of the partnership and can create a sense of trust. This makes future investment a less risky prospect.

Many businesses choose to support charities that tackle social, economic or environmental issues in the local community. The benefits from this work for the business (such as a more skilled workforce, reduced crime, and increased local prosperity) can be more effectively enhanced through long term support.

Developing long term relationships does, however, limit the total number of charities a business is able to support.

Building the relationship

From the outset, it is vital to ensure that your expectations of the partnership and those of the business are similar. Identifying a company that has an alignment with the work of your organisation is an excellent starting point, as they are more likely to benefit from a long-term relationship. For more information on how to do this, read our article [A Good Fit](#).

Then research the company and listen to them to discover what they are hoping to achieve from their support of your organisation. Are they interested in raising the morale of their employees, or in improving their company's reputation? Is there a need in society that they are hoping to impact? Decide

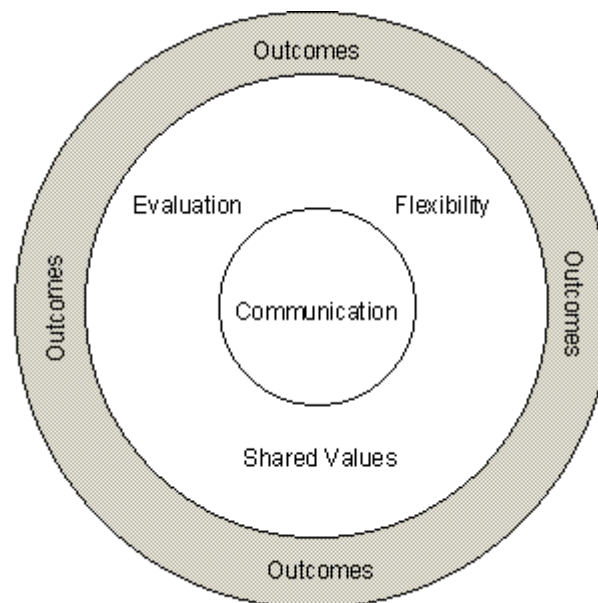
if you are able to help them meet these goals and, equally importantly, what you will both need to evaluate measure your performance against these goals.

Next, tell them what you are hoping to gain from the relationship. Are you looking for increased revenue or do you have other aims related to increasing the profile or effectiveness of your organisation? This process of clarifying goals and expectations will ensure that both parties are working towards the same end result and can be vital in avoiding misunderstandings further down the line.

Once the relationship has begun establish effective communication channels. These may be as simple as identifying one person in each organisation responsible for managing the relationship, or it could involve regular meetings. You could consider adding the company to your regular mailing list, inviting them to events that you hold, and providing them with information on volunteering opportunities for their employees. Most importantly, give them regular updates on the impact their support has had. These channels will create the mechanism for growing and developing the relationship.

Flexibility is also essential. Through the course of the relationship the financial position of the business and market place in which it operates may change. They may merge with, or be acquired by, another company. The geographic area they operate in could grow or shrink and their industry could face legal or economic challenges. Keeping informed of such changes will allow you to anticipate the needs of your business partner and to evolve the relationship accordingly.

The model of relationship management below is an illustration of the points made above.



Where to go from here...

Have a look at our "[How to...](#)" guides on forming business community partnerships.

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