University of California 4-H Youth Development Program



# **Tips for Asking for Business Donations or Sponsorships**

The businesses in your community have the potential to become significant sources of support. A business may have various motivations for helping a charitable cause. Perhaps the owner has a personal interest in your group's mission and goals or the business has made an express commitment to improving the community in which it operates (and from which its customers are derived). Just as you can request cash or in-kind donations from individual donors, you can request them of businesses.

## Start with a little background research on likely businesses

- Start by creating a master list of local businesses. First on the list should be any vendors
  or suppliers that you personally, your group, or its members, either regularly use, work
  at, or own. A connection within a business can make all the difference.
- Don't overlook businesses that don't have storefronts. A dentist once told me: "I'm surprised at how rarely I'm approached by local groups. If I were to get, for instance, a handwritten note from a student explaining what supplies were needed for a project, of course I'd give!"
- o If (as is optimal) you're working with a team of project members, divvy up the names of the businesses on your list. Each member should maintain responsibility for the businesses on his or her list from start to finish, carefully tracking all contacts and results. Showing up at a business that got solicited by your fellow group member only yesterday will not look professional!

### Think creatively about what you'll ask for or accept

- o Cash.
- In-kind donations.
- Volunteers representing the business's employees to help you with your project or to work at a fundraising event.

#### • Prepare written materials

- A short letter on your group's letterhead. Sample Solicitation Letter for a Business
- o A printed flyer with more information about your group's project.
- An explanation of the types of recognition that can be expected for their donation.
   Recognizing your Sponsors

#### Send letters in advance

- By sending a letter before you visit a business to request a donation, you can make sure to that you've said everything you want to without having to memorize a speech. One page is enough.
- o Include a stamped, self-addressed envelope, with a form for your prospective donor to fill out to provide their contact information, indicate what they plan to give and, if it is

an in-kind donation, who to call to arrange a pickup or determine other logistical matters. **Sample Pledge Form** 

## Follow up with a personal request

- o If you get no response within 10 days, plan to make a personal visit.
- Research the name of the person with whom you should speak, and ideally, schedule
  you're an appointment in advance. If you haven't scheduled an appointment, quickly
  explain your cause, and ask the front-desk person to direct you to the person who
  handles charitable donations.
- When you've got the right person, mention any previous letters you have sent or contacts you have made and review the basic points in your letter. Highlight any special reasons they should choose your group for a donation.
- Your demeanor is important here—conveying excitement about the successful project or event that you're working toward is much more likely to get good results than desperate begging or attempts to "guilt" the business owner into opening the coffers. If your organization or its key members are regular customers of that business, be sure to mention that—with statistics, if possible.
- O Hopefully, your visit will lead to an immediate "yes." But it could also lead to a "maybe," or "we'll think about it." Don't give up—you may have to follow up multiple times with a business before your request makes it to the right person and that person feels ready to make a decision. In any case, think of this as part of your relationship-building efforts. Even if this year's gift or sponsorship doesn't work out, you are laying the groundwork for a possible gift next year.

#### • Be specific about what publicity and recognition you'll offer in return

 Offering publicity is your part in that win-win situation described earlier. Both in your letter and in person, be completely clear about how your group will publicly recognize the business's sponsorship or contribution. For more information about providing visibility, check out <u>Recognizing your Sponsors</u>.