

Securing sponsorship for Green Open Homes events

Sponsorship can be a good way to help with the costs and practicalities of putting on an event.

Developing strong relationships with sponsor organisations may also have longer-term benefits for both parties.

What is sponsorship?

Sponsorship is an excellent way of providing much needed support to an event or organisation. However, unlike philanthropy or donations, sponsorship comes with the expectation of a commercial return. Money or support are offered in exchange for something seen as beneficial to the sponsor. In the case of green open home events, the value to the sponsor is most likely to be gaining access to an audience of potential customers who have an interest in low carbon technology and home improvements.

Note that sponsorship is different to advertising, where messages are controlled by the advertiser. Sponsors have less control over the message and the means through which it is communicated.

Is sponsorship right for us?

Before you go down the sponsorship route, consider the type and amount of sponsorship you are looking for. This could vary enormously, depending on the scale and scope of your event. Make sure that the time and energy you invest in securing sponsorship is in proportion to your event.

Other avenues which are well worth exploring to top up your event budget include: selling advertising space in your event programme and promotional materials; providing display space at a central venue in exchange for a participation fee; developing local partnerships to secure in-kind support; involving local not-for-profit groups to help deliver the event (and keep costs down); fundraising events or activities.

Benefits of sponsorship

Benefits to event organisers:

- Funding
- Credibility and endorsement
- Publicity through sponsors' channels
- Services (legal, etc.) and support - (logistical, systems, knowledge, volunteers, etc.).
- Connections
- More potential help e.g. with recruiting homes

Benefits to sponsors:

- Stimulating sales, trials or use of products or services
- Increasing brand loyalty amongst this group of people
- Creating awareness and visibility of their brand
- Changing or reinforcing their image (e.g. as environmentally friendly)
- Fulfilling a commitment to corporate social responsibility

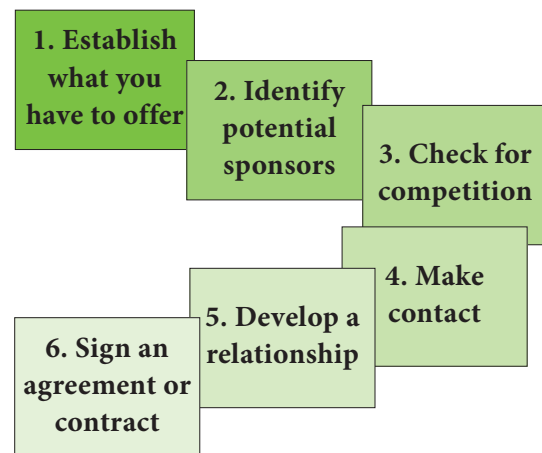
This Energy Saving Trust video features interviews with Bristol Green Doors sponsors and gives a good idea of the reasons they wanted to get involved and the impact on their businesses:

<http://youtu.be/fYvDSGOhJ8>

There can be scepticism about the value and role of sponsorship, which is why a logical fit, a good relationship and a clear agreement are all important. Not all members of a steering group or volunteer group will necessarily see the benefits in the same way, so ensure there is clarity over the aims.

Securing sponsorship: the process

Securing sponsorship can sometimes be easy. Companies may approach you with a clear understanding of what is on offer and ask to sign up. Other companies will require a different approach. To increase your chances of securing sponsorship here are some steps to follow. Do remember, it takes time.



1. Establish what you have to offer

As organisers, you have a number of assets you can offer sponsors. Depending on how you chose to run your event, the following can all be considered:

- Logos and branding on publicity materials
- Literature and displays in homes opening during the event
- Promotion of the sponsor company's profile through event newsletters
- Website traffic: links and leads to sponsor site
- Recommendations (details in case studies, mentions by householders)
- Merchandise (e.g. T-Shirts)
- Exchange of feedback and knowledge

- Opportunities for staff development through participation in the event
- Talking at associated events

You may identify more assets than these – for example, links with other local projects, or opportunities for training and apprenticeships, public art, community engagement, etc. All these assets can help you form meaningful sponsorship opportunities.

Once you have put together a list of your ‘assets’, and based around the level of sponsorship and the number of sponsors you are aiming for, you could consider offering a number of sponsor ‘packages’ offering different benefits for different levels of sponsorship. e.g. a sponsor could pay more for their logo to appear on all your publicity materials, or less to just appear on your website. This approach will be more relevant for larger events seeking a significant level of sponsor support.

2. Identify potential sponsors

Identifying potential sponsors can be time consuming and frustrating but it can also be worth it. Given the limited resources most of us have, remember that (unsurprisingly) a significant amount of sponsorship arises out of personal connections so look to develop what you already have. Typically, open home event sponsors come through the following routes:

- i. Householders
- ii. Personal contacts
- iii. Energy agencies
- iv. Local authority links and workshops
- v. Industry associations
- vi. Conferences and trade shows
- vii. Networking groups including online networking (e.g. LinkedIn)
- viii. Cold calling and letter writing

Look for sponsors where there is a good match with your event aims and your organisation’s objectives, but don’t just limit your search to retrofitting or renewables companies. Consider who else shares your organisation’s values. Because these events are about socialising, community, houses, and sustainability, it could be well worth considering estate agents, cafes, restaurants, bike shops, etc.

You might also use listings from your local Chamber of Commerce, business directories and so on to identify potential sponsors. It is worth being systematic about your work here. Keep records and add to them as time goes on.

- Create a wish list of sponsors
- Research each of the sponsors
- Record the details
- Perform a reality check – as the whole process takes time, check you aren’t aiming for something unobtainable
- Prioritise your list and decide how to approach each potential sponsor

3. Check for ‘competing’ sponsors

When you are putting together your list of potential sponsors, bear in mind that:

1. If there is significant funding coming from one sponsor it may be conditional on them not ‘sharing the limelight’ with other sponsors or funders.
2. Sponsors from the same sectors or industry areas may not be prepared to get involved if you already have support from a company or organisation they consider a competitor.
3. Even if there is not an issue around competitors, be careful to avoid a situation where a sponsor thinks that their funding is driving all the activity and another corporate entity is getting a free ride out of it. This is probably more problematic for bigger sponsors who have more professional marketing and strong views about their brand identity and associations.

4. Make contact

Whether you do this by phone, email, letter, meeting at an event or literally turning up at the doorstep, remember: lots of people can say no and only a very few can say yes. This means you need to allow time. Lots of it.

Don't expect anyone to agree to sponsor you during the first conversation you have with them. Instead broach the idea and if there is interest, ask for a convenient time to meet, talk, or to send more details and information.

5. Develop a relationship

Once you have an appointment, a responsive email or person at the end of the phone:

- Don't go the hard sell
- Demonstrate you've done research on them
- Find out what their marketing objectives are; look for links and common ground
- Prepare material that emphasises the benefits and value to the sponsor. If you decide to offer different sponsor packages, we recommend having a flexible discussion first. Later, set out what you have agreed the sponsor will get for their funding compared with other packages.
- Be clear about what you are offering. If possible, consider how you can measure the success of the sponsorship. What feedback can you facilitate? What are the desired outcomes and how can they be measured?
- Listen and respond. These are two different actions. Successful sponsorships are about relationships and must be seen as partnerships. It is really important to take on board the needs, issues, and requests of companies you engage with.
- Be professional. Although invariably your focus is on your event(s), sponsors will consider the

association as being with your organisation in a broader sense. How you conduct yourselves and are perceived publicly is therefore important.

- Demonstrate that you'll be around for the long haul. A sponsor will need to be reassured that your event is worth sponsoring, so having robust project plans, a good track record, and endorsement from larger agencies will help.
- Be flexible and open to ideas. It's better to have some sponsorship than get none because of inflexibility.

If you are able to build a strong relationship during your first event, the sponsor is more likely to consider sponsoring again in future.

6. Sign an agreement / contract

Don't forget that you are providing goods and entering into an agreement with another commercial body, so this needs to be clear and professionally handled. Issuing a contract will show you are doing this. Make sure that it is signed before providing any goods or services to the potential sponsor. Sometimes companies do not pay up!

Most companies will have their own contract agreement templates. There is some basic guidance on contracts and agreements in this PlanLoCaL resource (PDF): www.bit.ly/1cjGAtL

Remember...

- Green Open Homes events are a window to retrofitting and have real value.
- There are many reasons companies will sponsor, don't just look at the trades.
- There are different types of support.
- Securing sponsorship is not quick; think long-term and develop a relationship.

Following the process identified here should help.

The **Green Open Homes** network supports low carbon retrofit by promoting existing open homes events and helping new initiatives get going with resources, practical support and funding.

We've produced lots of other information sheets like this one covering legal and insurance issues, volunteers and marketing. See www.greenopenhomes.net