



1. How do you identify and prioritize potential corporate partners whose CSR values align with your mission?

Start by understanding CSR, or Corporate Social Responsibility. CSR is when companies make a commitment to do good in the community, beyond just making a profit. This can include things like giving to charities, supporting education, helping the environment, promoting health and wellness, or standing up for social justice issues. Many companies have CSR programs or departments dedicated to giving back through donations, partnerships, employee volunteering, or in-kind support.

So how do you find and prioritize these corporate partners?

1. **Start with your mission.** Think about who you serve, what services you provide, and what causes you care about. This helps you find businesses that care about the same issues.
2. **Research companies' CSR goals.** Look on their websites, annual reports, or news articles to see what they've supported in the past. Do they give to education, housing, health, or the environment? Check if they have a history of partnering with nonprofits like yours.
3. **Check public feedback and community impact.** Read community reviews or testimonials about the company to ensure they are respected and trusted, especially by the people you serve.
4. **Think about mutual benefit.** A good partnership should help both sides. For example, a yoga studio that supports mental wellness may donate classes or space to your nonprofit, and in return, they get community exposure and fulfill their CSR promise.
5. **Create a proposal tailored to their goals.** When you find a good fit, reach out with a sponsorship package that clearly explains how your mission and their CSR values work together. Include specific examples, goals, and how their support will make a difference.

Example. CSR in action might look like Walmart donating household supplies to shelters because they want to support low-income families and community health as part of their CSR focus. Or a pet company like Purina partnering with domestic violence organizations because they recognize the link between pet safety and family violence. These kinds of partnerships help the business meet its social responsibility goals *and* help nonprofits deliver services to those in need.

2. What's your process for developing a tailored corporate sponsorship or partnership proposal?

The key to creating a successful corporate sponsorship proposal is to do your homework first. You want to learn as much as you can about the company you're reaching out to - what they care about, what causes their support, and how they measure impact. This helps you speak their language and show how your mission fits with their goals.

So, what's the process?

- 1. Research the company deeply. Go beyond the surface. Look at the company's website, especially their CSR or community impact pages, annual reports, and social media. Pay attention to:**
 - What causes they've supported in the past
 - How they describe their values and goals
 - Any public statements or reports about their impact or giving strategy
 - Who they've partnered with before and why
- 2. Identify their priorities and metrics.** Some companies care about reach [how many people you serve], others focus on outcomes [what changed because of the support], and some may care most about visibility or employee engagement. Tailor your proposal to match what matters to them.
- 3. Use their language.** If a company uses words like "sustainability," "equity," or "community empowerment," mirror that language in your proposal. This shows that you've taken the time to understand their culture and values.
- 4. Show alignment and mutual benefit.** Make it clear how your program or event supports their CSR goals. For example, if your organization helps survivors of domestic violence and the company has supported family health or mental wellness, point out the overlap. Share what the partnership will *look like* - will they be recognized, have a chance to volunteer, or receive community visibility?
- 5. Present clear impact and expectations.** Lay out what you're asking for [money, in-kind goods, volunteers, etc.] and what they'll receive in return. Always include how their support will create change (Your \$5,000 donation will help 50 families access emergency housing supplies.)
- 6. Keep it professional and personalized.** Avoid generic proposals. Make each one feel like it was written just for that company, using real examples and a tone that fits their brand.

3. How do you structure engagement beyond funding - such as volunteer grants, employee involvement, or in-kind support - to build deeper corporate relationships?

Building a strong partnership with a company isn't just about asking for money - it's about creating opportunities for them to be part of the mission in meaningful, hands-on ways. These types of deeper engagements help companies feel more connected, build trust, and often lead to long-term support. By offering companies a variety of ways to engage - whether through time, talent, or in-kind support - you create stronger, more loyal partnerships. When a company feels involved, not just invested, the relationship becomes long-term and mutually beneficial.

So how do you do this?

1. **Get creative beyond cash.** Not every company can write a big check, but many are willing to help in other ways. Think about:
 - **Volunteer days:** Invite employees to volunteer at your events or programs. This gives them a chance to meet the people you serve and see the impact firsthand.
 - **In-kind donations:** Items like office supplies, hygiene kits, food, clothing, or gift cards can be just as valuable as cash.
 - **Employee giving programs or volunteer grants:** Some companies give money based on how many hours their employees volunteer with you.
2. **Engage the right people inside the company.** Sometimes the key is "courting the individual." That means connecting with someone inside the company who *personally* cares about your cause and can champion your organization from within.
3. **Build trust through consistency.** Corporate partners want to know their support is going to a reliable, well-run organization. That means showing up with good communication, clear results, and professional follow-through every time. As Jelks noted, trust and integrity go a long way in building lasting relationships.
4. **Track and report volunteer hours.** Volunteer time isn't just helpful - it can also count toward a company's CSR metrics and even result in financial credit for your organization. Always keep a record of who volunteered and for how long and share those impact numbers with the company.

Example: If a local bank can't donate funds but wants to help, you might invite their staff to volunteer at a school supply giveaway. If they do it every quarter, and you track 200 volunteer hours a year, that could qualify for a volunteer grant - or even a future sponsorship once they've seen your impact up close.

4. How do you approach state - level funders and grant programs effectively?

Reaching out to state funders or government grant programs isn't just about filling out an application - it's about building relationships, telling your story clearly, and showing why your program is needed. The process is strategic, and Brandee Jelks offers key advice on how to stand out and get noticed.

Here are the best approaches...

1. **Be intentional and to the point.** When writing a proposal or speaking to a state official, make sure your message is clear and focused. Explain what your program does, who it serves, and what gap it fills in the community. Funders want to know why your program matters and how it's different from others.
2. **Highlight what makes your program unique.** State funders are often looking for programs that solve specific problems. Share data, stories, or trends that prove your program is filling a real need. If your services reach an underserved group or solve a growing problem, that's your edge - make it known.
3. **Court political figures just like corporations.** Invite state and/or city leaders to visit your program in person. Let them see your impact with their own eyes. Share success stories and statistics that relate to their interests or legislative priorities. Just like corporate sponsors, political figures are more likely to support what they personally care about. If a legislator is passionate about youth empowerment, and your program mentors' teens, that's a perfect match - point that out directly.
4. **Know your political chain.** Understand who the decision-makers are at every level - city, county, state, and federal. Learn what committees they sit on and what social issues they care about. This helps you tailor your pitch and build stronger connections.
5. **Get involved in public forums.** Show up at town halls, legislative hearings, or community roundtables. Being visible in these spaces helps funders recognize your organization as a credible, committed community leader.

Example: If your organization serves domestic violence survivors and you learn that a local senator is focused on family safety, invite them to tour your shelter. Provide them with a short impact report showing how many families you've helped, what services you provide, and how your work aligns with the issues they advocate for.

5. What systems do you use to monitor corporate or state funding commitments—and maintain transparency and stewardship over time?

To manage funding relationships with integrity, nonprofits need organized systems in place to track every dollar, donation, and promise. It's not just about receiving funds - it's about being responsible, staying compliant, and building long-term trust with funders. Transparency isn't just a best practice - it's how you earn trust and keep support over time. With the right tools, clear records, strong communication, and ethical leadership, your nonprofit becomes a partner funder can rely on year after year.

Let's start Step 1:

1. **Use a tracking system (CMS).** A Client Management System (CMS) like Salesforce or Charity Tracker helps keep records in one place. We started with Charity Tracker as it was free, but now we use Salesforce. These tools track donor information, deadlines, volunteer hours, in-kind gifts, grant reports, and funding agreements. That way, nothing falls through the cracks.
2. **Document everything - down to the last detail.** Every donation and expenditure - whether it's money, supplies, or volunteer time - should be carefully logged. This is important for:
 - Giving donors proper tax credit
 - Helping with your nonprofit report outcomes
 - Showing your organization is trustworthy and professional
3. **Report results and impact clearly.** Funders want to know if their support is making a difference. Having data ready - like how many people were served, how funds were used, and success stories - shows you're accountable. These reports also make it easier to ask for renewed or increased funding in the future.
4. **Communicate consistently and proactively.** Don't wait until the end of a grant period to reach out. Stay in touch with funders regularly, even if it's just to give a quick update, share photos, or invite them to an event. This shows stewardship and keeps them engaged.
5. **Build a reliable team to manage relationships.** Don't try to handle everything alone. Assign staff or board members to manage funding relationships, reports, and communications. This keeps things running smoothly and helps prevent burnout.
6. **Always protect your integrity.** Stay in compliance with all grant rules and funder policies. Never make promises you can't keep or offer favors in return for funding. Long-term relationships are built on trust, professionalism, and ethical behavior.

Example: If a company donates laptops for a youth program, log it into your tracking system, record the value, and track which students benefit. Send a thank-you letter, a photo of the laptops in use, and a short report showing how it improved student learning. This not only shows appreciation - but it also proves you're a good steward of their gift.