

Fundraising and Sponsorship

Overview:

There are many options for teams to raise/acquire money, materials and supplies to support their team's mission and goals, such as sponsorship, grants and fundraisers and in-kind donations. Begin your fundraising efforts well before the extremely busy build season starts in January. It is a good idea to schedule fundraising activities throughout the year.

The Prospects:

1. Look for companies that:
 - Produce innovative products and have a reputation for creativity.
 - Have a high profile in your area related to engineering, architecture, computers, hardware or software, advertising, and/or community involvement. Also look to industrial or medical suppliers, pharmaceuticals, patent/copyright offices, technical development, information technology, manufacturing, or youth focused corporations.
 - Ask the parents of team members if they have any connections. Perhaps one or more can help make contact with companies in your area through the Corporate Giving Department for a donation.
2. Talk to the principal of your students' schools and find out if the education department already has partnerships with local businesses. One of them might be interested in helping you start/maintain team.
3. Find out who the largest employers in your area are by calling your state representative's office for information. Web search engines having custom sorting capabilities may provide leads about technical companies in your area. Many of these local companies may be interested in helping because they have a stake in your community.
4. Contact the Chamber of Commerce and request the names of companies that might be interested in partnering with schools on a project to help develop a pool of future employees qualified in science and technical fields.
5. Research association web sites, especially those involved with engineering.
6. Submit an article to a local newspaper about your team and indicate the need for funding.
7. Visit the web to find out whether setting up a non profit organization for your team fits your needs. If so, there are numerous sites offering suggestions to implement, and run a non profit.
8. Call your local college/university and ask for a meeting. Very often these schools welcome inclusion because they can use the program as part of their curriculum.

The Approach:

Potential sponsors will be interested in the positive publicity team sponsorship will provide and the long term appreciation of a future workforce on the team. Many smaller companies and individuals make great FIRST sponsors/partners. For instance, ask a sign company to donate a team banner...and include their name on it. Be sure to tell them, their banner will travel with your team to your event(s) and you will proudly display it in your Pit station.

The Preparation:

Before you speak with a potential partner, donor, or sponsor, do some research. Ask around to find the best contact person at each business or corporation. Does anyone on the team know someone who works there? It is best to try for a contact in senior management, such as the head of Engineering or Human Resources. Make sure you have dates and times in mind before you call to ask for and set up a face to face meeting. Be sure to bring all potential sponsors some information sheets from the FRC Communications Resource Center located on www.usfirst.org. You may also want to create some handouts specific to your team. Know what you need and prepare a list in advance. THINK BIG!! Ask for the full registration amount when you petition for funding, but be prepared to graciously accept any offer of help. If a company can't or won't donate money, ask for services such as machining, mentoring, or the loan of meeting/facility space. Other in kind donations could include tools, supplies/materials, food, printing, copying, or team T shirts.

The Presentation:

Know what you are talking about when you call or visit, and smile while you are there. Understand what FIRST is about, and be sure you can articulate it to others. Be brief, but describe your team's makeup FIRST is about, and be sure you can articulate it to others. Be brief, but describe your team's makeup including the number of kids and their ages, team goals, and accomplishments to date. Show enthusiasm!

Provide budget information and the amount you have already raised. Consider bringing a PowerPoint presentation about your team's plans for using the potential sponsor's donation. Whenever possible, bring students to do some of the talking and convincing. Bright, enthusiastic young people are hard to resist!

In your presentation or letter, include some of the donation benefits to the potential partner, such as:

- Promotes community visibility
- Presents networking and marketing opportunities with other sponsors
- Provides a pool for interns and future employees
- Re energizes and renews the team involved engineers' love for engineering

An excellent way to reel in recruits is to bring them to an event. If the official competition season is over, find a listing of "Community Events" on the FRC "Events" portion of the usfirst.org web site. These off season competitions run through the summer and fall. Once potential sponsors see the creativity, action, fun, and excitement, there's no holding them back! If you don't feel comfortable in this role, find (or recruit) someone else who does. The school principal or the science, math, or physics department head might be a good representative. If you already have corporate support, a well informed representative from manufacturing, operations, IT, or a technical discipline would be an excellent choice for this role.

The Close:

Don't forget to come right out and ask for the money. Ask high; they may be willing and able to support your team. If there is silence after your request, don't talk at all. Wait until the prospect

responds, even if the silence is uncomfortable. If they are unable to provide full funding, ask for a specific amount for a specific line item. If asking for financial support doesn't work, ask for specific items (meeting space, access to machines, technical support). If nothing works, ask direct questions to identify their objections and listen to what they are NOT saying.

The Follow Up:

Whether or not the prospective partner agreed to help the team, be sure to follow up with a thank you letter within a week. Include a couple of the information sheets from the usfirst.org web site and a team brochure if you have one. Reiterate your budget needs, and write a sentence or two on how their support will positively impact the future workforce of the area. Thank the prospect for the meeting.

If there was a promise of funding, machining, or mentoring support, send a letter of thanks and detail what you understand the agreement to be or what you hope the partner will provide as support. Mention what the direct impact of the donation will do for your team. For a promise of engineering or technical support, include a list of your needs, the above mentioned printouts, and a sample teamwork schedule. Provide a synopsis of how you will use their support as well as your team's approach to the design and build phase. If you send the letter and there still is no commitment, but you saw a glimmering of interest, ask someone on your team with persuasive writing skills to keep the "prospects" in the loop by sending notes about the team's progress during the build phase. Include a picture or two. Generate curiosity. Invite them to an event to see your team compete.

When the season is over, send a picture of your team and robot at an event. Detail some of the experiences, accomplishments, and excitement of the team. If there were newspaper articles, send copies. Schedule a visit to partners, donors, sponsors and potential partners, donors and sponsors for early next season.

Grants:

Grants are a good way for teams, especially rookies, to get a leg up on funding. Grant availability varies from year to year, but grants are usually offered right around registration time, so be sure to check usfirst.org often. Read all the details of a grant before applying as some grants require of participation at a specific event, or the involvement of mentors from a specific company.