A Volunteer’s Guide to Requesting Sponsorship Donations

Corporate sponsorship of the VisionWalk program accounts for approximately 20% of all event related revenue. Most corporate sponsors make donations because they are personally asked by a friend, family member, or colleague. Although we offer attractive benefits for each sponsorship level, most donations are simply that – donations. All corporations like sponsorship benefits, but you’ll find that they are more excited to support YOU than to receive the benefits.

With that in mind, the following tips will help you make a request for a sponsorship donation and, hopefully, get a positive response!

Who should I ask?

You should ask anyone you have a relationship with that could provide a cash donation of $250 to $10,000. A personal ask is 10 times more effective than a cold call or letter to a company where you don’t have a relationship. Remember, most corporations are more interested in giving to you than to the cause itself. Some possibilities include:

- The company you work for
- The company your spouse works for
- A business you regularly patronize (dry cleaner, salon, dentist, etc.)
- A business owned by a family member or friend
- A family foundation
- A business with an interest in our cause (ophthalmologists, retinal specialists, etc.)
- A local Lions Club (each club gives individually)

How do I make the ask?

The FFB Events Manager working on your walk will create a sponsorship packet that includes a cover letter, a list of sponsorship benefits and opportunities, a reply form, and information about the Foundation. The more you personalize your cover letter, the better. When ordering your sponsorship packets, ask your Events Manager to send you some blank Walk letterhead too. In addition, the Events Manager can provide a template letter to start you off in the right direction.

Be upfront and make your request within the first few sentences. Many people do not have the time to read the entire letter and simply scan it for the most pertinent information. You want to set the tone by stating your purpose early and clearly.

If you feel comfortable, suggest a sponsorship level in your letter. You may have a relationship with the company and have an idea of what sponsorship level they might be able to provide. Don’t be afraid to ask for a bit more than you think they are capable of giving. If the company is interested in a donation they will come back to you with a lesser amount. For example, you may suggest they participate at the $2,500 Community Leader level. That may be too much for them, but they will be willing to donate at the $1000 Partner level.
Who do I present the packet to?

Find the decision maker. The closer you are to putting the packet in the hands of the final decision maker, the better your chances for success are. This may be a department head, the CEO/President/Owner, or the head of Charitable Giving, etc.

Try to present the packet in person. You will get the opportunity to talk to your contact about the Foundation, VisionWalk, and the benefits of sponsorship. If the connection is with a friend or family member’s company, ask them to hand deliver the packet to the appropriate person. Our goal is to attach a name or fact to your ask so it will stand out in their stack of requests. If you cannot arrange a face-to-face meeting, ask the Events Manager to mail the packet with your personalized letter in it.

When do I make the ask?

Timing for sponsorship can often be a tricky thing. You may want to find out if a company gives based on the fiscal year or the calendar year. The company may track their giving in a database and automatically reject multiple asks in the same year. Try to avoid presenting a packet near the winter holidays. By this time companies are toward the end of the giving and will replenish their budgets in the New Year.

Also, be cognizant of your Walk’s print deadline. This deadline is stated in the sponsorship packet. All logos for the posters and brochures are to be received approximately four weeks before the Kick Off. This gives FFB ample time to design and print the materials for distribution at the Kick Off. You will want to present your packet at least 2 weeks prior to the print deadline so your prospect has the option to take full advantage of the sponsorship benefits. Sponsorship commitments of $2,500 or more are entitled to have their logo on our brochures, posters, and t-shirts.

How do I get a YES?

You have a much better chance of getting a positive response if you ask people you know to support you. Once you’ve made the ask, follow up with a phone call about one week later to inquire about the status of your request. Keep following up with your contact until you get an answer. The worst answer you can get is not “no,” it’s “I’ll get back to you.” If you get a “no” response, note the reasons why. We may be able to approach them again next year. If you don’t get an answer, you will need to continue to follow up until you get one. That’s why no answer is worse than a “no” response.

Last but not least, work with your Events Manager. They are here to help you every step of the way!

Let the Events Manager know who you are approaching with a sponsorship request. He or she will keep a list of all the potential sponsors that volunteers are approaching and circulate it regularly. This will prevent multiple requests to the same company. Also, keep the Events Manager updated about the status of your request. There are print deadlines that must be met and we will want to have as many sponsors as possible committed by our brochure and poster print deadlines.