5.2 BUILDING ORGANISATIONAL CAPABILITY

Partnering with the private sector

USE IT
To help non-profit organisations prepare for, enter and get the best from partnerships with companies

WHEN
When researching and preparing for business partnerships, and in their early stages

WHO
Your organisation

Use this guidance alongside your partnering policy (tool 5.1) and the conflict of interest tool (tool 2.2).

The opportunity

Companies that take new approaches to how they operate in new and emerging markets can find significant opportunities: reaching new markets and engaging new producers and consumers can be essential to staying competitive. Non-profits can build on this by designing programmes that bring both business and social gains, such as helping companies make supply chains more efficient responsibly, or creating dignified employment for underserved groups, including enabling people with disabilities to thrive economically on an equal basis.

What non-profits bring

- Technical skills, resources and relationships to tackle the social, economic and environmental issues that affect business
- The ability to co-create, from research and design to practical, outcome-based solutions on the ground
- Experience across industries, tailoring each partnership to its circumstances
- Strong relationships with partners' in-house teams and with peers in civil society

Make it work

- Define roles and responsibilities clearly, and build mutual trust and understanding
- Create space for learning and evaluation
- Consider how business and government can come together around social outcomes

Pitching your offer

Communicate clearly how you add value. Can you help the company:

- secure future supplies, as competition for resources grows?
- meet the needs of consumers in fast-growing markets?
- cut costs by using resources better and reducing waste?
- build credibility with consumers who expect companies to behave responsibly?

- motivate staff who expect their employer to meet its wider responsibilities?

Be strategic: company motivations range from non-core to core business.

Philanthropy
Reputation and employee benefits

Strategic social investment
Social or environmental investment; licence to operate

Compliance and risk
Direct business risk; supply chain sustainability

New markets
New business opportunities

Preparing for a first meeting

1 Make the first connection

Find a personal introduction wherever possible, professional or through friends: "so-and-so suggested you might be interested" creates social capital and opens the door. Otherwise, research the right contact; many companies have sustainability or public affairs teams.

2 Understand the company

- What does it do, where does it operate, and what is its reputation?
- Who are its main clients and stakeholders? Does it operate where your programme does?
- What are its sustainability policies and focus areas, and its existing partnerships and giving?
- Does it have a separate foundation?

3 Prepare your material

- Be clear how you will present the opportunity, or preferably a range of them. Your printed material will be passed around the company, so it must make as good an impression as you do.
- Include: an introduction to your organisation; the vision, context and need; your beneficiaries, with numbers and real stories; activities and results; what makes you different; testimonials; existing business partnerships and what companies gain, in their words; plans for the future; opportunities for new partnerships.

At the meeting

During

- Be professional, and on time
- Treat it as a two-way conversation, not a sales pitch. Don't assume you know what the company needs
- Ask informed questions that show you have done your research
- Don't be apologetic or defensive: you are offering an opportunity, not begging
- Stress the positive benefits of your work rather than the problem, and never try to make people feel guilty
- Listen to the company's own ideas
- Use interest-based negotiation, and be flexible to widen the options

Leaving

- Agree clear next steps, such as a visit, another meeting or coming back in a year, and leave material
- Always end positively, whatever the outcome: things change, and people move companies
- Ask who else might be interested, to grow your network
- Send a thank-you email setting out next steps

Adapted from How to strengthen collaboration (Tool 6). © The Partnering Initiative. More tools at thepartneringinitiative.org/resources/type/tool/