**Factsheet**

**Attracting and retaining sponsors**

**Step 5 – Build and maintain relationships**

**Creating a sense of belonging**

**Why do businesses sponsor Football Clubs?**

Football Clubs have the opportunity to create a real sense of belonging between its community and sponsors. Creating and maintaining relationships where people feel as though they really belong to the Club is very powerful. Ideally sponsors should feel like they belong to the Club as much as players and supporters.

To build long term relationships with sponsors, it is important for Clubs to understand what the sponsoring business wants to achieve from the sponsorship.

As initially discussed in Step 1, generally, there are four reasons a local business will sponsor their local sports Club:

1. They have an existing connection with the Club, either as a player, member or supporter or have a family member/friend linked to the Club;
2. They want to be a part of the Club, engaged and feel a strong sense of belonging and inclusion with the Club;
3. They want to contribute, or at least be seen as contributing, to the local community;
4. It is financially beneficial to them.

**Creating a strong sense of belonging between the Club and the sponsor**

Possibly the most important part of creating long term partnerships between your Club and a sponsor is to build a strong sense of belonging between the Club and sponsor. If a sponsor has a strong sense of belonging to the Club, where they feel they can participate in the activities of the Club at any time, then they are more likely to assist the Club to achieve its goals and to support the Club over the long term.

This long-term support gives the Club every opportunity to renew the sponsorship each season and potentially increase the level of that sponsorship agreement.

**Don’t focus simply on the sponsor**

When seeking to create a strong sense of belonging between your Club and your sponsors, don’t simply focus on the individual sponsor. Identify ways to include their partner, friends and family. If the sponsor’s friends and family are invited into the Club, made to feel welcome and included in Club activities this will strengthen the sense of belonging between the Football Club and sponsor.

Local businesses have extensive networks of customers and suppliers so look to create opportunities where you can include these groups in the Club activities as well.

Maximising the social value of the sponsorship, for many sponsors the most important component of a sponsorship package.

**The power of the “Sponsors’ Day”**

Having a day or an event where the Club invites all of their sponsors to join them at the Club for a social gathering is a great concept. Generally, this will be on match day so the sponsors can socialise with a wide range of stakeholders and then see their sponsored players/teams in action.

The best time to hold a Sponsors’ Day is very early in the season and the day should have some very clear objectives. This of course, includes thanking the individual sponsors for making the season possible but also:

* Ensuring all sponsors have a clear understanding of the Club’s objectives and vision and invite them to help the Club achieve them;
* Creating ways for the sponsors to participate in Club activities (social and competitions) throughout the year;
* Introducing the sponsor to other sponsors who are effectively other local business people.

**Allocate a host for groups of sponsors**

A really powerful way of making sponsors feel welcome at your events is to allocate a Club representative to host the sponsor at the event. A Club representative may be allocated to a number of sponsors and their role is to welcome and host the sponsor throughout the event, ensuring that the sponsor is introduced to key Club representatives and other sponsors. This ensures the sponsor immediately feels welcomed and included, especially if they are new to the Club.

**Social events**

Ensure your Club schedules a number of social and fundraising activities throughout the year for the broader Club community. Invite sponsors to these events, but remember when inviting a sponsor to Club activities don’t simply focus on the business owner but also create opportunities for their partners, family, associates and friends to be involved as well. Attending a Club function may be daunting initially but if the sponsor is able to include their friends, family or work colleagues in the activity then they may be more willing and able to attend, thus becoming a part of the Club.

Again, when sponsors are coming to Club events appoint a Club representative(s) to welcome and host the sponsor and their guests to ensure they feel immediately included in the activity or event.

**Create networking opportunities**

As Clubs engage with more sponsors, a very powerful way to create value for the sponsors is to create networking opportunities within your sponsorship community.

Football Victoria is doing this successfully with its Community in Business program (for further information <https://www.footballvictoria.com.au/community-in-business>) .Community in Business is a community-based business network that brings together key stakeholders within football including businesses, Football Clubs, media and government.

Create as many networking opportunities as possible for your sponsors throughout the season, and your sponsors will thank you for it in the following year’s renewal.

**Gestures of appreciation**

It is important that at the commencement of the season, Clubs present a gesture of appreciation to the sponsor. For sponsors, this is important, they are able to show their own customers that they are supporting their community. By proudly displaying your Club’s gesture of appreciation it can be seen by everybody they do business with. This gesture of appreciation could take many forms such as:

* Certificate of appreciation which can be displayed in the sponsors shop or office;
* A sticker promoting the fact this business is supporting your Club which the sponsor can then display on their shop window or if they are a tradie on their vehicle or trailer;
* A thank you letter from the President;
* A gift such as a Club shirt, jacket or hat which identifies them as a sponsor;
* Framed jumpers or shorts displaying the sponsor's logo;
* A logo/or image which the sponsor can display on their website and social media.

It is important that as soon as possible after a business becomes a sponsor that they receive something that shows their support of your Club to their community.