



SU EDINBURGH UNIVERSITY
SPORTS UNION

PARTNERSHIPS GUIDE

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Introduction

Successful partnerships are key to running a sports club. They can ensure income via sponsorship, reduce costs for your members, and help raise awareness of important issues. Many clubs have social sponsors, but increasingly clubs are also looking further afield, partnering with local businesses, charities, and other sports clubs.

A partnership will benefit both parties and for sports clubs this will often be discounts/sponsorship payments in exchange for marketing the partner business to your members and wider audience. Other examples could be raising awareness and money for a charity, in exchange for the charity providing resources for your members, or coaching at a community club in exchange for facility use.

As a club you can have multiple partners across a range of areas. It is important to be honest with potential partners and inform them of other partnerships you have, but generally as long as there is not a conflict of interest, there should be no issues.



Where to Start?

As a committee you should have a look at your current partners (if you have any) and decide which ones you would like to renew. After that, have a look at the areas of your club which could benefit from a partnership - this could be a sponsor for socials, a discount for equipment, access to certain facilities, or you might want to raise awareness of an important issue with members.

Make a list of businesses which you would like to approach. Good places to look are local businesses and charities, and ones which already attend the same events as your sports club, however there is no need to restrict yourself to these.

If you have connections through current members and alumni, these are always great routes to partnerships.

Think about your club values and how they fit the image of the prospective partners, as a minimum your partners should not contradict your club values, but if your values are similar to the business's then be sure to mention this, as this can help build a connection.

Remember - partnerships take time!

Building partnerships should be an ongoing process throughout the year. Even if you don't get something signed this year you can still set up a deal for next year's committee to carry forward.

What do your members want?

Think about your typical member – their age, where they live, and their interests. If your typical sponsor is no longer working, it might be time to start thinking about a new one.

It is often useful to meet with a partner so both parties can make sure they are on the same page and fully understand what is required. This can avoid issues with fulfilling the contract and claiming kickback/sponsorship money later on.

When negotiating with a partner, it is important to know your worth. If you feel like you are being ripped off, stand your ground.

Formal or informal?

Formal partnerships involve an annual agreement, however, informal partnerships with an unwritten agreement can be just as valuable. Don't forget about your informal partnerships when managing your partners and handing over committee positions - they require maintenance too.



Negotiating with Partners

When negotiating with potential partners, you should keep in mind what the business needs and what you can offer them.

Data about your members is important here - businesses will want to know what you can give them and the more you know about your club composition (numbers, age range, interests, what they are studying, what year they are in, competitive/recreational, number of alumni, social media reach, size and location of events you attend) the more you can prove this to a business.

When emailing a target partner, see if you can find the direct email for who you need to speak to at the business. You should also use your club email account and not your personal email when communicating with them - this is more professional, and also makes it easier to hand over information about partners at the end of the year.

Businesses are most likely to choose clubs to partner with which have a low risk to them as a business. The more you can prove to a business that you are a reliable partner, the more likely they are to take you on.

Social Media

If your social media is professional, on-brand, shows that you are involved in positive initiatives and campaigns, and includes space for sponsor logos in posts, then partners will see this and see how partnering with you can boost their image.

Think Beyond Social Partnerships

Social sponsors are great but your sports club is of interest to so many more businesses and organisations. Examples of other partnerships clubs to look into are:

- Student targeted organisations; this could be a company looking to recruit graduates, a local hairdresser, or a stationary supplier.
- Charities (see charity section for more info); particularly those who support a cause your members are passionate about or can educate your members on an important issue.
- Local community groups; many will be looking for coaches, and other help, and may be able to offer expertise and facility access in exchange. Getting involved with a group outside the university can allow you to spread your passion to others, and may even inspire school-aged children to join your club at university.
- Other university sports clubs; sometimes strength is in numbers and there will be projects and events that multiple clubs can work on together. Although many agreements will be ongoing throughout the year, it is also possible to partner for one-off events.



Charity Partnerships

Partnering with charities is a great way to promote a cause which is important to your members. Your members will get the chance to make a difference, whether that is raising money, awareness, or volunteering for the charity. Some charities which work with students and young people (such as mental health charities) will want to reach your club's demographic and may be willing to come in and do a talk with your members.

If you are running an event in support of a charity, check out their website or get in touch with them. They may be able to provide resources or give your club a shout-out on social media.

Smaller Clubs - Marketing Yourself

As a smaller club, it is sometimes harder to sell yourself to potential partners, particularly sponsors, due to your smaller audience. However, there are certain ways you can increase your appeal to partners. Team up with other similar clubs (for example other adventure sports, or other Scottish university teams) to increase the size of your 'club', if you are in contact with alumni, use them to increase the scale of your audience. If you will be advertising your partner on social media, use your social media followers.

Managing Partners

Once you have secured a partnership, effort should be made to fulfil conditions of the contract to a good standard. If committee members do not engage with and support the partnership, it will make it difficult to encourage other members to do the same.

Partners will not renew if you haven't met conditions, had poor communication, or were seen to be taking advantage. It is also important that the partner meets their end of the deal. If your partner has poor communication, or being is difficult about sending over sponsorship payments and you're struggling to resolve this, please contact EUSU.



Partnerships & COVID19

Businesses in Scotland are back up and running and eager to get customers through the door. Be aware that some may still be cautious about taking financial risks because of COVID but many will also be relying on clubs and societies to rebuild their customer base. It is particularly important this year to meet the conditions of your partnership to a high standard as businesses will have less money to spare on poor partnerships.

Be understanding of businesses' concerns, but do not let them use COVID as an excuse to undervalue you. If you rely on a partnership to carry out club activity and are struggling to renew it, speak to the Sports Union. It is advisable to keep in communication with these partners and not let them fizzle out if they are important to you, however if it is going to be a while, it may be worth looking into other options.

Looking Ahead

During the year you should also have a think about how you can improve your appeal to sponsors. You could work on improving your appearance and following on social media, growing your alumni engagement, and gathering data about your members (make sure this is in line with GDPR).

Case Study: EUSSC

Club: Snowsports

Size: Over 100 core members (1000+ for ski trip)

Values: Having fun, being welcoming, inclusive team, family feel, along with sustainability to try and counter some of the travelling they do.

Seeking partnerships: Partnerships mainly dealt with by the Vice President and President, with other committee members also working with partners related to their role (socials and trip director for example).

At the start of the year, they will sit down and list potential new partners, and think about which partners could fill what area. They will then approach potential partners via email, making sure they focus on what they can offer partners (social media is a big one).

Some potential partners will also approach Snowsports, but fewer of these are taken on. Alumni are also a big help for connections when finding partners, they are often keen to help if they work in a business.



Case Study Cont.

Displaying partners: Snowsports will display partners' logos on social media posts and as a banner in their website footer.

Examples of partners:

- Aloha - sent over ingredients for cocktails for a social during lockdown
- Ski Racing Supplies - gave the club a large discount on club ski racing supplies, allowing new students to try ski racing on top quality equipment.
- NUCO – logistics partner for ski trip.
- POW - charity partnership, joined up with Heriot Watt and ran 2000 miles in July for charity. In the past, Snowsports have also done things like sell old kit for charity.

Top tips:

- Sending out lots of emails makes a difference - don't be put off when some businesses don't want to speak, you will be surprised who picks up.
- Even if you are a small club, big up what you are doing - how many people will see you at competitions?
- Cool pictures help, this can be a selling point for sports which photograph well.

Helpful Links & Contact

To sum up, if you have questions on any of the above information, don't be afraid to reach out to Heather, she's here to support. If you're unsure where to start, Heather can set up a meeting to chat through your club's position, and offer advice on this, or work with you directly on how to improve your current set of partnerships.

Any questions regarding work with community groups should be sent to Millie.Doherty@ed.ac.uk.

Finally, if you require a sponsorship agreement template, there is one on the Sports Union website. Before signing a new agreement, please send it to eusu.partnerships@ed.ac.uk so we can check it over.

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