

CLOSING THE
FUNDING
GAP

by Ed Bauer



Every show choir director knows the feeling.

You have a brilliant show concept. The costumes are spectacular. The choreography is sharp. The students are working harder than ever. Then someone opens the budget spreadsheet and suddenly everyone develops a nervous twitch.

Transportation costs have increased. Hotel prices have climbed. Costume expenses seem to multiply overnight. Sound equipment isn't getting any younger. And let's not even discuss the cost of rhinestones.

For many programs, the fundraising conversation usually revolves around selling something. Cookie dough. Candles. Discount cards. Popcorn. More popcorn.

While traditional fundraisers

certainly have their place, there is another source of revenue that many show choir programs have barely tapped: corporate and local business sponsorships.

The truth is that businesses spend money every year trying to get their names in front of local families. Show choir programs happen to have exactly what businesses want—engaged audiences, community goodwill, and hundreds of loyal supporters who attend events throughout the year.

In other words, your show choir may be more valuable to sponsors than you realize.

The Great Sponsorship Myth

Many boosters and directors avoid sponsorships because they believe three things:

1. Businesses don't have money.
2. Nobody wants to meet with them.

3. Someone else is more qualified to ask.

- Announcer mentions
- Website visibility
- Community goodwill

Fortunately, all three assumptions are usually wrong.

Businesses allocate marketing budgets every year. They routinely sponsor youth sports, charity events, festivals, golf tournaments, and community organizations.

The real question isn't whether businesses sponsor local causes.

The question is: Why aren't they sponsoring your show choir?

If your students perform for thousands of audience members throughout a season, host competitions, maintain active social media accounts, and engage families across the community, you have something worth sponsoring.

The challenge isn't finding money. It's making the connection.

Stop Asking for Donations

Here's the first sponsorship hack that changes everything:

Don't ask for a donation.

Ask for a partnership.

Those two words may sound similar, but psychologically they are worlds apart.

A donation sounds like charity.

A partnership sounds like business.

Most companies prefer partnerships because they receive something in return:

- Logo placement
- Program advertising
- Social media recognition
- Event signage

Every booster organization contains a hidden sponsorship goldmine.

When approaching a business, think like a marketer, not a fundraiser.

Instead of saying:

"Would you be willing to donate to our show choir?"

Try:

"We have several sponsorship opportunities that connect your business with thousands of local families throughout the season."

One sounds like an expense.

The other sounds like an opportunity.

The Secret Weapon Sitting in Your Booster Club

Every booster organization contains a hidden sponsorship goldmine.

Parents.

Take a moment and think about your current booster membership.



Someone owns a construction company.

Someone manages a bank branch.

Someone works in healthcare.

Someone sells insurance.

Someone manages a manufacturing facility.

Someone serves on a chamber of commerce board.

Yet many sponsorship efforts begin with cold calls to complete strangers.

Why?

Start with the people already sitting in the booster meeting.

Create a simple exercise.

Ask every family to list:

- Their employer
- Businesses they own
- Professional organizations they belong to
- Business relationships they have

You will be amazed how quickly a sponsorship prospect list develops.

The warmest lead is almost always someone who already knows your program.

Getting Past the Fear Factor

Let's address the giant elephant wearing sequins in the room.

Fear.

Most people are not afraid of sponsorships.

They are afraid of rejection.

The thought process goes something like this:

"What if they say no?"

Here's a liberating reality:

They might.

And that's perfectly fine.

Professional salespeople hear "no" every day.

Professional fundraisers hear "no" every day.

Successful sponsorship programs are built on hearing lots of "no's" before hearing enough "yeses."

One director told me they secured over \$25,000 in sponsorships after contacting nearly 80 businesses.

That means many businesses declined.

The success wasn't avoiding rejection.

The success was surviving it.

A useful mindset shift is this:

You are not asking for yourself.

You are advocating for students.

Most people will willingly do difficult things when it's for kids.

When you're nervous, remember that you're not selling vacuum cleaners.

You're creating opportunities for young performers.

That's a much easier conversation to have.

How to Get in Front of the Decision Maker

Here's where many sponsorship

efforts die.

Someone walks into a business and asks the first person they see.

The receptionist smiles politely. The information gets placed in a drawer.

The sponsorship request disappears forever.

Instead, focus on finding the actual decision maker.

This might be:

- Owner
- General manager
- Marketing director
- Community relations manager
- Branch manager

Here's a surprisingly effective script:

"Hello, I'm with the local show choir

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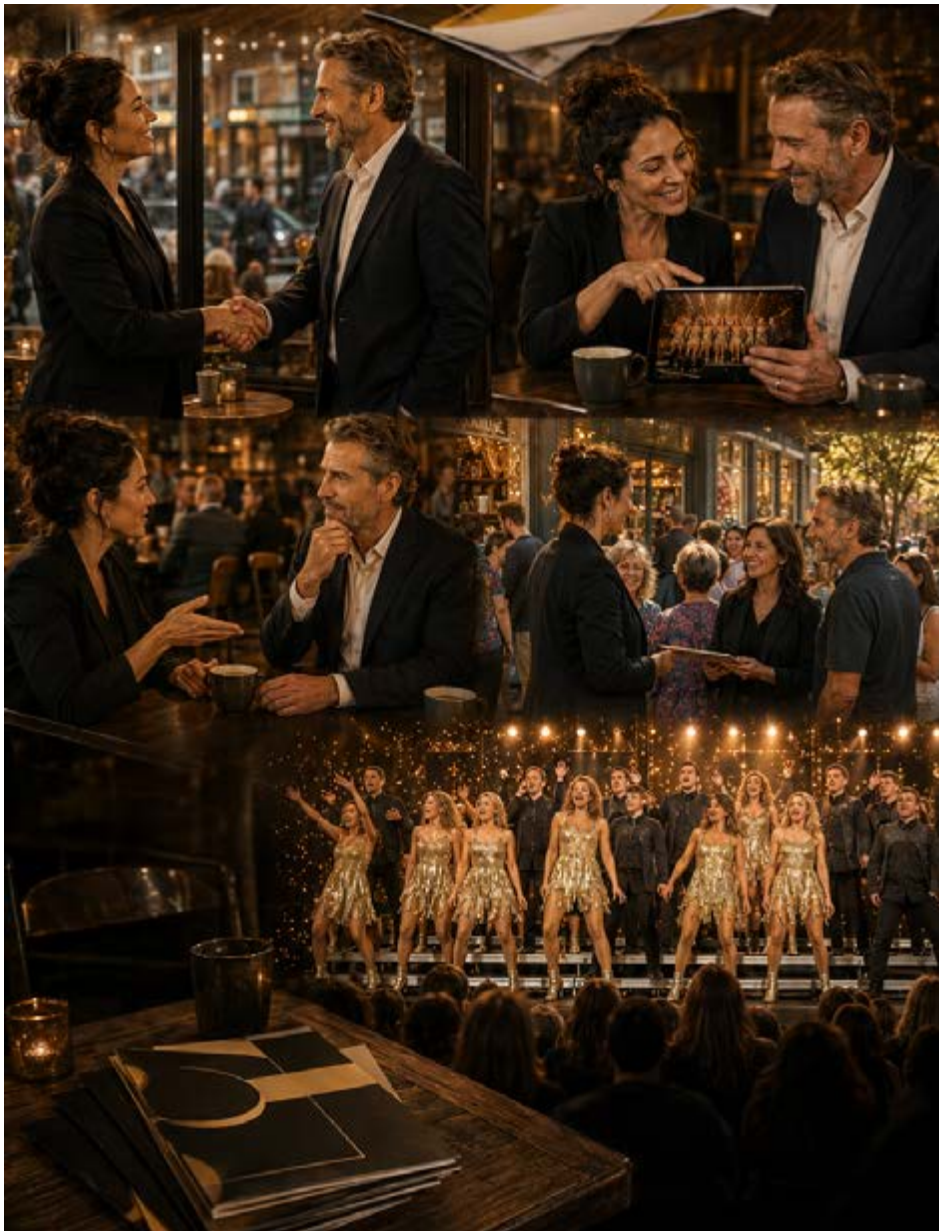
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program. Who handles community sponsorships and marketing partnerships for your organization?"

Simple.

Direct.

Professional.

Most people will gladly point you in the right direction.

Once you identify the correct contact, request a brief meeting.

Not an hour.

Not thirty minutes.

Fifteen minutes.

Busy professionals are much more likely to agree to a short meeting.

The Coffee Shop Strategy

One of the most effective sponsorship hacks is what I call the Coffee Shop Strategy.

Instead of presenting a sponsorship package immediately, invite the business

leader to coffee.

The purpose isn't to ask for money.

The purpose is to build a relationship.

People support people they know.

- During the conversation:
- Learn about their business
- Ask about their goals
- Discuss community involvement
- Share the impact of the program

By the end of the meeting, the sponsorship discussion feels natural rather than transactional.

Relationships create sponsors.

Brochures alone rarely do.

Create Sponsorship Levels That Make Sense

Many programs accidentally make sponsorship decisions harder than necessary.

A sponsorship menu should be simple.

For example:

Bronze Sponsor – \$250

- Program recognition
- Website listing

Silver Sponsor – \$500

- Bronze benefits
- Event signage

Gold Sponsor – \$1,000

- Silver benefits
- Social media promotion
- Announcer recognition

Platinum Sponsor – \$2,500+

- Premium visibility
- Event partnership opportunities
- Featured recognition

The goal is to eliminate confusion.

People often choose from options more easily than they respond to open-ended requests.

Think Beyond Money

One of the biggest sponsorship mistakes is focusing only on cash.

In-kind sponsorships can dramatically reduce expenses.

Examples include:

- Printing services
- Transportation discounts
- Food donations
- Hotel partnerships
- Construction materials
- Equipment loans
- Marketing support

Every dollar you don't spend is effectively a dollar raised.

A restaurant providing meals for a competition weekend can be just as valuable as a financial sponsor.

Sometimes more valuable.

Turn Competitions Into Sponsorship Magnets

If your organization hosts a competition, congratulations.

You are sitting on one of the strongest sponsorship opportunities available.

Sponsors love events.

Events create visibility.

A local company may have little interest in funding a bus trip.

They may be very interested in sponsoring an event attended by thousands of people.

Think creatively:

- Hospitality Room Sponsor
- Best Vocals Award Sponsor
- People's Choice Award Sponsor
- Warm-Up Room Sponsor
- Livestream Sponsor
- Judges' Lounge Sponsor

Suddenly sponsorship becomes tangible and visible.



Businesses understand exactly what they are supporting.

The Follow-Up Superpower

Here's a secret that separates successful sponsorship programs from unsuccessful ones.

Follow-up.

Most people quit after one contact.

Successful sponsorship teams follow up professionally and consistently.

A possible schedule:

- Initial email
- Follow-up call one week later
- Personal visit if appropriate
- Thank-you message regardless of outcome

Persistence often wins.

Not because businesses enjoy being pressured.

Because people are busy.

Many sponsorships are secured simply because someone remembered to follow up.

Become Ridiculously Good at Saying Thank You

This may be the most important section of the article.

When someone sponsors your program, your job is not finished.

It's just beginning.

The easiest sponsorship to secure is often the sponsor you already have.

Make sponsors feel appreciated.



Ideas include:

- Student thank-you videos
- Handwritten notes
- Social media spotlights
- Sponsor appreciation banners
- Recognition at performances
- Year-end reports showing impact

Imagine receiving a handwritten note from a student explaining how a sponsorship helped them participate in show choir.

That's powerful.

That's memorable.

That's how long-term sponsorship relationships are built.

The Community Wants to Help

Many directors and boosters assume businesses view sponsorship requests as interruptions.

The reality is often the opposite.

Business owners live in your community.

Their children attend local schools.

They attend performances.

They want thriving arts programs.

They want positive opportunities for students.

Sometimes they simply need to be asked.

The greatest risk isn't hearing "no."

The greatest risk is never asking at all.

Final Curtain

Every show choir program faces financial challenges.

Travel costs rise.

Production expectations grow.

Budgets tighten.

Yet communities are filled with businesses looking for meaningful ways to engage with local families and support worthwhile causes.

The opportunity exists.

The audience exists.

The potential sponsors exist.

The question is whether your program will step into the spotlight and claim its share.

So gather your booster leaders.

Build your prospect list.

Schedule the meetings.

Tell your story.

And remember: if your students can perform a four-minute show with costume changes, choreography, and live vocals in front of a packed audience, surely the adults can survive a 15-minute sponsorship meeting.

After all, compared to singing and dancing under bright lights, asking for sponsorships is practically easy.

Almost.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Ed Bauer has been in publishing for over twenty years. He was introduced to Show Choir by his daughter and he is forever grateful to her for this wonderful gift.

