



Transforming Local Infrastructure Pro Bono Cluster

How to... work with the business community

It's not just community groups, charities and social enterprises that are looking for ways to survive and meet local needs, the business community faces stiff challenges in the current economic climate. Working together is one way of jointly facing the future - a great recipe for mutual success.

The secret is strong relationships, and knowing one another well enough to be able to discuss what you really want to achieve and how you can help one another.

There are many different reasons why businesses may want to work with you: for personal development of their staff through a new experience or responsibility; by motivating staff who will enjoy 'giving something back'; by increasing a positive reputation and potential exposure to new customers; through helping fulfil the demands of their buyers criteria (supply chain) and of course, corporate social responsibility, an overarching sense of responsibility towards the community and environment.

Here are some tips for working with businesses:

Find a good fit

Start by approaching business to suggest a trial period of one off support, such as training or volunteering, in order to help to build a lasting relationship which is based on shared values and visions. It's worth taking time to identify each other's skills, expertise and priorities and where you can add value to each-others' work. This might be solving a particular problem that is meaningful to both of you.

Overcome assumptions and build trust

False assumptions are a barrier to relationships. Identify what they are and put them to one side. Many businesses take their work and contribution to society very seriously. The process of identifying shared values and priorities will help build trust, as will demonstrating an understanding of and sensitivity to business needs. Be prepared to explain your own work, as businesses might also have made their own assumptions.

Find a common language

Businesses and voluntary organisations frequently use very different language to talk about quite similar things, and what appears to be jargon can turn out to be relevant to your work. Part of the challenge is having the patience to listen to each other and understand.

With an agreed willingness to work together for mutual benefit, voluntary organisations and businesses can develop lasting, productive and valuable relationships.

More information

TLI partner, Business in the Community, is creating a programme of events, to be run by local businesses, for the voluntary sector. Contact Phil Hunt on 01902 717491 or Philip.Hunt@bitc.org.uk for details. W | www.bitc.org.uk

