



Building Relationships with Funders and Commissioners

Introduction:

Building good relationships with funders and commissioners is very important for getting access to funding and influencing policy decision-makers. It takes time and effort and may seem to be an unnecessary distraction from the core work of your organisation, but can be crucial for sustainability.

The information below provides useful tips on networking, and guidance for developing and maintaining relationships with funders and commissioners.

General tips for 'networking':

Why go to meetings and events?

- To publicise your work and build the reputation of your organisation
- To find out about: new developments in your area of work, funding, sources of support, new policies and strategies
- To influence policies, strategies and decisions affecting your work
- To meet people who can help your organisation with its work, or who you could do joint work with, or develop a partnership project

Staff and volunteers in women's organisations don't have the time or resources to go to every meeting, forum, training session or event - so it is essential to choose your meetings carefully and network as effectively as possible.

In many ways, networking in a work situation is similar to making contact with people in a social situation. Not everyone feels comfortable with networking; so think about who would be the best person to attend a particular meeting or event – they might be staff, volunteers, trustees or service users.

Here are a few tips for effective networking:

- Go to meetings and try to make sure you always speak. You could ask a question or make a point; always make sure you introduce yourself and your organisation when you do this
- Go to conferences, events and training sessions. Check the list of participants and try to speak to people who might influence or have a connection to your work.
- Offer to talk about your work at other people's events or meetings

- Check whether any of the people you already know could put you in touch with people you want to meet – ask them to introduce you or invite you to a meeting where you can meet each other
- Find out more about the people you want to meet – their interests, work, involvement with other organisations, networks etc. This can help you to engage them in conversation and focus on issues they are likely to be interested in
- Organise an open day or event – invite the people you want to meet and make sure you talk to them!
- Once you get to speak to someone you want to meet, tell them about your organisation clearly and concisely. If possible practice what you want to say before you meet with the person. It is important to engage them in conversation and listen to what they have to say
- Follow up brief (or longer) conversations with people at events by contacting them soon after – by phone preferably or by email
- Give people your contact details (business cards, leaflets etc.)
- Visit other projects, talk to people doing similar work to you – this might be an opportunity to find out about a key meeting, learn about a new source of funding or plan to jointly influence someone
- Present your organisation or your case positively

Presenting your case: what is special about your organisation?

Think about your 'unique selling points':

- The extent or urgency of the problem or need
[This is very important; funders want to see strong evidence of need.]
- The emotional appeal of your work
[What you're doing is important and it's ok to feel strongly about it.]
- The excellence of your organisation and its work
[What is your track record and reputation? What do people say about you? Do you have evidence of your achievements?]
- The extent to which your work is innovative
[Many funders like new ideas or approaches. It may be difficult to develop new projects all the time, but if you are dealing with a problem in an unusual way with much better results, it is good to promote this.]
- The cost effectiveness of your work
[Of course, funders like to see value for money. What is the value of your volunteers' time? Are you able to use venues and/or other resources for free or at a low cost?]
- Any element of investment or leverage
[By supporting your work, will a funder be investing for the future or potentially enabling more money to be raised e.g. match funding?]
- Endorsements by respected people
[Funders are likely to be influenced by the views of people they respect. If they trust you then the funder is more likely to.]
- The involvement of volunteers
[The involvement of volunteers, including trustees/management committee members, means people are willing to give up their time to support your work. Their involvement shows that your work must be something valuable for the community and increases community participation and cohesion.]

- Support given to you by your community
[This might not be local – it could also be a wider community of interest.]
- The serious consequences if your work were to stop
[This can sound like a threat, so you need to be careful about this.]