

How to Engage with Private Sector Partners & Businesses

Private Sector Engagement Toolkit - Tip Sheet #4:

How we interact with the private sector can have a large influence on how effective we are at establishing relationships and sustaining connections with private sector actors. The tips on the *How to Talk* tip sheet and *Building Relationships with the Private Sector* tip sheet supplement those listed below.

Tips for Engaging with Private Sector Partners

1. Make an appointment with them and give them an accurate estimate of how long your meeting will be. Be on time, even if they are not.
2. Dress in a business-like manner. They need to take you seriously and see that you are a legitimate partner.
3. Get to the point, especially if you sense any impatience on their part! The private sector, whether rural farmers, urban processors or corporate directors are busy and do not have time for long, drawn out meetings. At the same time, keep in mind cultural norms and protocol.
4. When making a proposal, if culturally appropriate, lead with the main offer. Start with that and then make the case rather than building up to that with a long justification. Traditionally in business negotiations everyone wants to know what is the main point first.
5. Avoid unnecessary meetings. Try to plan your meetings so they cover a number of issues that will reduce the frequency that you and the private sector partner will need to meet. At the same time, recognize that it may take a few meetings before a private sector partner feels comfortable enough to commit to a project.
6. Firms typically have a cultural framework that is different than ours. This includes the way they communicate, dress, conduct their business, and their underlying organizational and personal values. Recognize those differences and organize our engagement with them in mind.
7. Respect confidentiality. If they share information that could be intellectual property or corporate secrets, keep it private. Remember, they may be competing with other firms we work with, and expect us to protect their confidential information. Make sure they understand that you recognize the importance of this.
8. Try to mix up the place and context of your interaction. Engage at any level which is functional and acceptable to both the parties including the personal, organizational, family, community, professional, political or spiritual level.
9. Expect that they are likely to want to be engaged in new and different ways than other program partners. They may be more hands-on and also may interact in ways that don't fit the predictable "One progress report per quarter" format. Generally assume they're going to be deeply, if only intermittently, involved in "your" project.
10. Be open to feedback. Listen to criticism with an open mind and learn from the feedback you get.
11. Be honest - clearly explain how your proposed collaboration will benefit both your program and their bottom line.
12. Ensure the private sector partner understands the social goals and activities of the project. This will strengthen the partnership and they may have good ideas about how to improve program activities.
13. Do your homework! Research the basics of their industry. Understand the value proposition that your project might bring them and be able to talk in detail about that. Your understanding of their business and interests will get you initial trust and helps forms a strong partnership.
14. If we are making a proposal or pitch to the private sector, frame it as an "offer" rather than a "request". Doing so will help us focus on the opportunity and what we can offer the private sector partner – not what we're asking them to give us. This can help us organize our thoughts and make a stronger pitch.

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