

How to Raise Sponsorship Money for Horse Events

By Nancy Riffle

Horse shows are a fun business, full of beautiful horses, flashy attire, and competition for cool prizes. But behind the scenes there is a lot of work involved in preparation. One of the needs of any horse show is cash flow, and a great way to have funds available is to raise sponsorship money.

Sponsorships are funds that benefactors such as private individuals or companies put up towards a horse show class or session. Most shows do not have a 501c3 tax status (for charitable donations), even if not for profit, and sponsorship money is considered an advertising or promotional expense. Only if the show has received a 501c3 tax status may these funds be used as a charitable donation. Be clear to your sponsors what type of contribution they are making. One of the benefits to collecting sponsorships is timing. You can begin collecting sponsorship dollars long before the start of the show. This gives the show funds available to cover expenses and deposits that may need to be paid prior to the show.

First determine what amount to charge for sponsorships. Prize costs for a particular type of class (regular or championship) can be used for the cost of a class sponsorship. In this manner, a sponsorship will offset the cost of that class. Corporate sponsorships can be at whatever level you determine is appropriate. Suggested levels may be \$500, \$1000 and \$5000. Your show committee can determine what benefits that you may offer corporate sponsorships for their contributions, such as advertising in print or on site, premium parking arrangements, etc. Then entries fees can help to cover other show costs, or maybe even allow a profit that can help be start-up money for the next show!

Second, have a sponsorship form that will give details of the sponsorship. This helps keep track of your sponsorships and provides you with record of each. These can include sponsorship levels available (class, championship class, corporate: silver, gold, platinum, etc) and their costs, benefits to the sponsor (if any), advertising that is available (if not part of a sponsorship), information about the show (name, date, etc), and where to send the sponsorship form and funds. Also include a deadline for turning in forms if your sponsor wants to be included in any print advertising. These are just some basic pieces of information to have on your forms and you can design them to fit your specific needs. Forms done in two-part duplicate are also helpful to give a receipt to your sponsor as well as keep for your records.

Next, create a cover letter to send or handout with sponsorship forms. These can be formal or more personal depending on your style and who your target recipients are. In your cover letter introduce yourself and the show you are representing. Also detail the show more fully by describing the breed(s) and type of classes you are offering. Is it a zone or regional championship that may be of additional benefit for the sponsors? Explain what the show has done in the past, or what charity it benefits (if applicable) and how it helps that charity. Include any information that you think may help your

prospective sponsors learn about your show and why they would want to help be a part of it. And most important thank the sponsor for their contributions.

Fourth compile a list of prospective sponsors that may be interested in your show. Decide how you want to contact your target group. This can be by mail, e-mail, in person, by phone or a combination of these. Mail cover letters and sponsorship forms early so they have plenty of time to arrive, be considered, sent back and received. Mailing costs can add up, but it has a very professional look and gives the recipient a hard copy to look over and retain. E-mail an introductory/cover letter and include an attachment of your sponsorship form if at all possible, and allow plenty of time for consideration and receipt back. E-mail is more quickly delivered and can be sent to a large target mailing list with little to no cost, but unfortunately is less responded to. Go in person to people you know, local companies in the area of the show, retail outlets or suppliers of equine goods or services, and corporations that you may have connections to. Introduce yourself and the show, and explain that you are looking for sponsors. Offer them your cover letter and a sponsorship form, and leave it with them if they don't have time at the moment. Describe what benefit they may receive from helping to sponsor: advertising, donation, etc. And of course, be gracious and thank them for their time whether they can help sponsor or not. Then check back on any promising sponsorship leads with a follow-up phone call.

Last, organize your returned sponsorship forms. Keep a record of all of your sponsors so that you can include all their advertising in your show program or on the show grounds, as well for your financial records. A spreadsheet is a good option for record keeping. Add a special thank you page in your program for all the show sponsors. Keep a show sponsor list for future shows so you have a list of all those who contributed in the past, for future reference. And it is always gracious to send out written thank you cards after the show.

Horse shows are indeed a fun and exciting event. Utilizing sponsorships will aid in your cash flow and help make your show profitable. Keeping organized and on schedule will help things run smoothly, eliminating stress and saving your valuable time. Keep the business and work to a minimum and have a great, fun and prosperous show!