

GETTING IN THE DOOR: BUILDING SUSTAINABLE RELATIONSHIPS WITH BUSINESS AND INDUSTRY



COLD-CALLING. MAKING THE PITCH. CLOSING THE DEAL.

Every partnership has to start somewhere, and despite a commonality of interest and mission, Ecosystem leaders can find it difficult to develop lasting industry connections. How do you get a foot in the door? Once you're in, what do you say? And how do you establish the connection you need?

1 STEP ONE: MAKING THE CONNECTION

Ideally, you will have an existing connection -- a business relationship, a history of social engagements, or just a friend -- to use as a starting point to build a broader, lasting connection with the appropriate contact in your target industry partner. But how important is that existing connection? And if you don't have that connection, how do you make one?

KEY TAKEAWAYS:

Know your contact. Do your research, and know who you are approaching. Make a connection with a decision-maker, or someone who can get your message to the right people. Be able to explain why you have approached the person you selected.

Be respectful of your contact's time. Understand that you are dealing with businesspeople who equate time with time with profit. Make every effort to ensure time with them is valuable, and use their time wisely.

Be direct. Strive to be transparent when explaining who you are, what you're doing, and, most importantly, how it aligns with your target company's mission and goals. Be sure to address your ability to positively impact the company's community involvement goals.

"When you're talking about industry, you're not talking about a building. You're talking about people, so there is some connection that you have to find. In most cases, there's a messenger to the champions. But you want that person to be able to speak your truth and your values to the champions. Keep in mind, you're not the only person asking for a partnership."
-Reginald McGregor, Indiana STEM Ecosystem

STEP TWO: MAKING YOUR PITCH

You have made a connection and landed a meeting. Now what? How do you effectively communicate your message and your ask? Are you even speaking the same language? Because your connection views their time as a valuable commodity, an effective presentation is direct, relatable, and relevant to your target partner's mission and goals.

KEY TAKEAWAYS:

Explain what you need. Communicate your request in straightforward, specific terms. Explain not only what you have done and how you have been successful, but also how you believe your target partner will help further your work.

Speak the language.

Although you may feel the need to use certain 'magic words' in your presentation, businesses now have expanded their lexicons to include newer terms meant to address the broader, community focused aspects of their work.

Understand the 'why.' You have your own goals, but are you able to relate your goals to those of your target partner? If you mean to connect your message with that of your target company, understand and explain how your message meshes with the company's.

"Time is just critical with our companies. They don't have a whole lot of it. And so when you do approach them, you're going to have to have your pitch ready. **It needs to be succinct to the point, but they also have to see the relevance** and the value in the ask that you're making of them."

-Scott Fry, Mid America Industrial Park

"I know a lot of times people come to industry partners and talk about the importance of economic development and workforce development. That's a part of it. But let me give you some new terms to use when we start building relationships with partners for now and for the future.

Return on Purpose --

The ability to help your target partner accomplish its goals, both inside the company itself and with regard to community outreach.

Return on Quality of Life --

The ability to help your target partner improve its community's overall quality of living.

Return on Retention --

The ability to connect your target partner's individual employees with its community-focused goals, understanding that the more connected employees are to their communities, the more likely they are to remain with the company.

I know people always like talking about 'what's the return on the investment?' A lot of times you might not speak to that. But you can speak to the quality of life that you're going to help us improve." -Reginald McGregor

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STEP THREE: CLOSING THE DEAL

Your conclusion is just as important as your introduction. Reiterate your proposal and remind your contact how it was established. An ongoing relationship will be mutually beneficial. Also, don't forget to thank them and keep them included in the work.

“So when you're talking to prospective new partners, you know, you can also let them see what they can bring to the table and fill in gaps because we don't have all the answers and all the pieces.”

-Celeste Sciandra, Northeast Florida STEM2 Hub

FULL RECORDING OF WEBINAR AVAILABLE HERE:
<https://stemecosystems.org/webinar/building-and-sustaining-relationships/>

KEY TAKEAWAYS:

Make it Personal. It is important to speak from a personal perspective when concluding your presentation. Explain to your contact not only why establishing a relationship is important, but also why your message and work is important to you on a personal level.

Remind me why I'm important. Do not shy away from appealing to your contact on a personal level. Explain how a lasting partnership will benefit the target company, and further the company's goals at both the business and community levels.



Xan Black, Executive Director, Tulsa Regional STEM Alliance

Celeste Sciandra, Program Director, Northeast Florida Regional STEM2 Hub

Reginald McGregor, Manager of Engineering and Employee Development, Rolls-Royce Corp.; Indiana STEM Ecosystem

Scott Fry, Director of Workforce Development, MidAmerica Industrial Park

“I think it's very important that we do take the time to figure out what we do understand, what we don't understand and help facilitate those connections.” -Scott Fry

