

# 10 Tips to finding (and keeping) your perfect private sector partner

1. Be clear about your reasons for wanting a private sector partner. Draw up a 'would like to meet' wish list listing the criteria you would like any potential partner to have. This will provide you with a solid starting point to help you identify potential partners.
2. Choose your partner deliberately. Identify businesses whose mission and values complement your own or where there is clear common ground (e.g. client group or service area) or a personal connection with your work.
3. Look at who you already have relationships with. The best partnerships are usually based on established relationships where trust and mutual respect already exists. Do you already have established relationships with companies that could be built on (e.g. private sector board members, suppliers)
4. Attend business networking events. Start mixing in business circles. You are more likely to find a partner through making personal contacts. Remember people are investing in you as much as they are your organisation so make sure you make a good first impression.
5. Do your research. Find out as much about potential partner organisations as you can; their values, reputation and their business needs.
6. Know your own value. Don't under sell yourself. What is your Unique Selling Point (USP)? Make sure you are armed with information that will help to demonstrate that you are a reputable organisation with a solid track record.
7. Leave ideology and the begging bowl at the door. One of the biggest barriers to building successful vcs-private partnerships is a fundamental mistrust of the private sector (and, conversely, stereotypical views of vcso's as being 'warm, fuzzy and always asking for money'). Successful collaboration requires both parties to let go of these preconceived ideas.
8. Build a strong business case. Always ask yourself 'What is in it for them'? If you can't come up with a strong business case for the partnership then neither will they.
9. Identify potential areas of incompatibility early and consider if, and how, these can be overcome. Take time to understand each others different cultural and working practices and see if there is anything to learn from how the other partner operates.
10. Plan as partners. Agreeing roles and shared objectives / outcomes should help to ensure that the partnership is based on an equal footing. Make sure that responsibility for delivery and the allocation of any risk is shared.