



# Building mutually beneficial relationships with global corporations

## 4 BIG INSIGHTS FOR SMALL ENTERPRISES

Scaling a business can't be done alone. It takes partners, big and small, to help on the journey.

Global corporations may be able to support your enterprise in a number of ways. They have expertise to share or help you access crucial finance.

It's important to understand what a corporation might look for in a collaboration, as well as what they might be able to offer before you reach out.

The insights here will help you consider and plan your approach – giving you and your business the best chance of gaining valuable corporate support.

## How a **COLLABORATION** with Unilever helped the Social Factory set the wheels in motion for expansion

The Social Factory is a community enterprise focused on developing a new model for plastic recycling and economic inclusion. It is based in Ekurhuleni, South Africa, where most waste is collected by informal waste sector workers. The Social Factory is a partnership between Oxfam South Africa and the municipality of Ekurhuleni which aims to integrate informal waste pickers into the municipal waste management system, in areas poorly served by the municipal waste collection services.

The enterprise wants to build a processing plant where the majority of the profits will go back to waste-community-based enterprises'. A Community Trust, representing Waste Community based Enterprises, will also own a majority stake of the Social Factory.

Their initial request for funding towards building the plant was too big and had too many untested assumptions. However, Unilever was willing to help the enterprise prove they could collect enough plastic to justify a processing plant and test the assumptions required to make it a success.

Unilever gave a small grant to help the Social Factory implement their training and capacity building plan, which included training in key human resource and financial management skills.

This initial groundwork helped the Social Factory make a successful application for a larger grant from TRANSFORM, an initiative led by Unilever, the UK's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office and EY. That grant is now enabling them to set up new sorting centres and further increase their capacity to process waste.



### Find out more

Partnerships are key to scaling your enterprise. Learn more about the successful partnerships that other enterprises have achieved. [Read their stories here](#)

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## Companies are interested to **HEAR** from you

All companies look for opportunities that support their brand purposes or help them achieve their targets – for example, sourcing recycled plastics for use in their products. If your idea or enterprise fits with a company's objectives, they will be interested to hear from you. Be aware that companies receive many ideas for start-ups and requests for funding, so your approach needs to be targeted to stand out.

- Summarise your idea or solution simply and point out what makes it unique or different.
- Be sure to communicate the progress you've already made, and evidence you've gathered to prove the effectiveness of your idea or solution.
- Demonstrate how this is relevant to the specific goals of the brand or organisation you are approaching.

## Consider what a specific company can **GIVE** you

Ask yourself what is unique to that company, before you approach them. If you send a general list of what you need help with, it will not match the capabilities that company can offer.

- Even if a company can't help you with funding, they may be able to give you expert input and advice.
- They might also be able to support you with a specialist skill that you would find very useful.
- If they are not able to work with you, they may be able to connect you to others in their networks who could.

## Get **HELP** with putting together your business case

Having support from a financial services company could help you validate your business model and show the business what benefits they would get from the collaboration.

- With their specialist skills, they could help you evaluate your activities, show how you are moving towards sustainability, or prove your potential for development.
- Having the input of a respected company will help potential funders to feel confident about your business case.

## Break your **PROJECT** down into phases

If your request for support or funding is turned down by a company, it may be that it is too early for them. You may need to develop your idea or enterprise further, before a company is willing to support you.

- Explore what the issue is. Sometimes you need to take a step back to figure out why they couldn't work with you, and what they would need to collaborate towards your vision.
- Perhaps a company could collaborate with you on a smaller aspect of your project. For example, they might provide a small pot of funding or support to help you prove your innovative model works – so that you can move forward to the next step.

**"Find somebody within the company you want to approach – or another entrepreneur who has done it successfully – and ask for help and advice on how to structure your proposal."**

Preola Adam, Unilever Sustainability Manager, 2012–2023



TRANSFORM is an impact accelerator that unites corporates, donors, investors and academics to support visionary enterprises across Africa, Asia and beyond. Together, we test and scale new solutions that tackle environmental challenges, improve health and wellbeing, and build inclusive economies.

Combining grant funding, business insight and research, TRANSFORM is advancing the development of innovative business models to help solve global challenges. It was established in 2015 and is led by Unilever, the UK's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, and EY.