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OFF-THE-SHELF INSTRUMENT

Sponsorship for natural areas

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Introduction

The substantial funding required to maintain natural areas (e.g. freshwater ecosystems), and to support future initiatives such as habitat restoration, species protection, and climate adaptation, means these projects are often financially unstable, as many of their benefits are not easily monetised. These funding needs, linked to ecosystem maintenance and restoration, just increased in 2024 due to the Nature Restoration Law (binding regulation nr. 2024/1991) requiring member states to restore 30% of degraded habitats by 2030, 60% by 2040.

Very recently the EU Water Resilience Strategy was approved, which will require additional funds for its implementation through measures such as water infrastructure upgrades, ecosystem restoration, monitoring systems, and governance support at the European Union level. Many other EU and national policies are also highlighting the importance of Nature-based Solutions, requiring investment to be implemented.

Traditionally, the primary sources of funding for natural areas in Europe have been grants from national or regional governments, structural funds from the European Commission, and direct subsidies through programmes such as LIFE+. In alignment with the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030, the EU Nature Restoration Law (NRL), and the Green Deal, there is an increasing emphasis on securing long-term financing for Nature-based Solutions (NbS) to support the delivery of restoration targets at scale.



In recent years, a range of alternative financing mechanisms has been developed to supplement or serve as substitutes for traditional grant-dependent approaches. For example, a fee of €8–10 per vehicle per day is charged at the Congost de Mont-Rebei (a natural reserve with a gorge formed by the Noguera Ribagorzana river, which passes through the Montsec mountain range in Leida, Spain). These funds are used directly, as stated on the ticket and displayed on-site, for maintaining the area, monitoring its environment, and managing its conservation tasks.

In addition, as in many other natural areas, a small donation box is available, but the donated amounts remain insufficient to cover the full maintenance costs of the natural area. One of the alternative ways to finance a natural area or a restoration project—such as many projects supported by the MERLIN Project—is: **Sponsorship.**

This document was developed under the MERLIN Project. MERLIN stands for Mainstreaming Ecological Restoration of freshwater-related ecosystems in a Landscape context: INnovation, upscaling, and transformation. MERLIN has the aim, among others, to deploy Nature-based Solutions (NbS) to restore freshwater ecosystems like streams, rivers, peatlands, and wetlands at landscape scale across Europe. These efforts directly contribute to the goals of the EU Biodiversity Strategy 2030, the NRL, and international frameworks such as the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework.

Ensuring the financial sustainability of ecological restoration is a key objective. **Sponsorship and brand licensing can play an important role in helping nature parks, protected areas, and other ecological sites generate additional revenue.** It allows them to strengthen their long-term financial stability and to not depend on unpredictable grants.

Sponsorship occurs when an entity (corporate, NGO, or governmental) commits funds to a project in exchange for specific promotional benefits.

In exchange for supporting the project, the sponsoring company receives public recognition—for example, through the display of its name and logo at park entrances, on park furniture, in visitor **facilities, or even as part of the official name of the natural area.** **Sponsorship can serve as an effective way to raise funds for nature restoration projects without engaging in activities that might harm or disrupt the local ecosystem.** Brand licensing offers a similar benefit as sponsorship, but in this case, it is the natural area or NGO's brand that is featured in the sponsor's marketing.

This document will explore what sponsorship is, how it can be implemented, and the main advantages and disadvantages of using it as a funding tool. Our focus will be primarily on **corporate sponsorship**, as sponsorship from governments or NGOs is less common and is expected to have less potential impact in the future. While many companies or wealthy individuals operate through foundations or nonprofit arms, we will treat them as corporate entities for the purposes of this document.

Although controversial because of the potentially sensitive names that parks or facilities at natural areas may adopt, this simple practice of sponsorship is gaining attention because of its strong fundraising potential. **It is already being used by sports stadiums, such as Bayern Munich football club's "Allianz" stadium and Barcelona football club's "Spotify" stadium.** More recently, this practice has expanded into the field of nature, with individuals or organisations paying to name part or the totality of a natural area.

The increasing cooperation between nature-oriented non-profit organisations and businesses has been mainly driven by a change in mentality. Initially, particularly from the 1970s through the early 1990s, NGOs considered businesses to be the causes of environmental problems, and, as a result, they mainly adopted an oppositional approach, aimed at raising awareness of the social and ecological impacts of corporate activities. In contrast, many (not all) now recognise the potential of businesses to have an invaluable positive impact on society, and they often communicate and engage directly with businesses about their responsibilities.

This more collaborative approach reflects emerging international frameworks which emphasises the role of private finance in scaling NbS, and IUCN's guidance, which supports companies in aligning their business models with nature goals (IUCN, 2023; UNEP FI, 2023).

Therefore, nonprofit nature organisations and private companies can collaborate while still maintaining the ability to speak out, either directly or indirectly, against harmful practices. Not all companies prioritise nature protection, but likewise, not all are driven solely by profit at the expense of the environment.

It is important to distinguish between donations and sponsorships, as the line between them is often ambiguous and depends on subtle differences. However, the tax implications of misclassifying one as the other are frequently underestimated. As a result, the legal and fiscal treatment of donations and sponsorships presents considerable challenges for non-profit organisations.

Much like in the U.S., government funding for British national parks has also decreased by 40% in real terms. "This will have a devastating impact on frontline services and bring National Parks to their knees," claimed the Campaign for National Parks in response to ongoing government funding cuts in 2023.

The WWF (World Wide Fund for Nature), or in the Netherlands the Wereld Natuur Fonds ("World Nature Fund", WNF), for example, always demands financial compensation for the use of its panda logo by partners. However, since the formalisation of its integrated partnership strategy, **it only offers its logo for use on products that meet certain sustainability criteria.**²

In conclusion, sponsorship of nature initiatives can be an effective tool for generating revenue, but it must be implemented carefully. If not managed properly, it can backfire, potentially harming the reputation of the natural area and resulting in liabilities that outweigh the benefits.

¹ Campaign for National Parks. "Severe Funding Cuts Threaten the Future of Our National Parks." Campaign for National Parks, www.cnp.org.uk/news/severe-funding-cuts-threaten-the-future-of-our-national-parks/. Accessed 10 Jan. 2025.

² Van Huijstee, M. 2010. Business and NGOs in interaction. A quest for corporate social responsibility [thesis], Utrecht: Nederlandse Geografische Studies 393.

Aim of corporate sponsorship in nature projects

The aim of this instrument is to provide guidance for nature restoration project managers on how to raise funds or secure in-kind contributions for their restoration projects through corporate sponsorships. This may include allowing sponsors to place their names or logos on selected assets within the restoration area or to feature their branding in initiatives led by the natural area or nature NGOs.

Sponsorship relationships between nature restoration projects and businesses are intended to deliver mutual benefit through the exchange of specific assets and activities that meet the needs of both organisations. What may begin as a bargaining relationship can turn into a partnership with a joint perspective and shared value creation. In such a partnership, the priorities of both parties are recognised and satisfactorily addressed (Van Woerkum and Aarts 2008). Both partners aim to share resources, knowledge, and capabilities; to develop goals jointly; and to coordinate activities to achieve the greatest common benefit. This requires not only communication about needs, but also a shared understanding of each other's interests.

The most crucial purpose of this type of agreement is to obtain funding to cover the costs of restoring, managing, and conserving natural areas (habitats, parks, etc.). **Increased public awareness of these projects through branding is a significant advantage, as it exposes the project goals to a broader audience, thereby increasing the likelihood of receiving support from individuals and companies.**

Creating a positive, and appropriate, brand association is an important objective for the sponsor. A natural area that is popular with families, for example, should not be sponsored by a beer or gambling brand. As a result, it is common to see sponsoring opportunities in zoos aimed at fostering family-friendly associations.

By explicitly connecting sponsorship opportunities to the EU's nature and climate goals, restoration managers can better position their projects in the context of policy mandates, increasing credibility in the eyes of sponsors that want to align their ESG (Environmental, Social, and Governance) strategies with regulatory and reputational expectations.

Potential beneficiaries

The potential beneficiaries of this instrument (sponsorship), apart from **natural area managers, include NGOs or other entities (e.g. municipalities)** that are responsible for the restoration or management of natural areas, such as lakes, parks, and reserves.

Sponsorships are considered a two-way synergy, meaning that both the sponsored and the sponsor benefit from the transaction. This dynamic means that we can consider the sponsors as potential beneficiaries of sponsoring nature focused initiatives. For effective collaboration, both parties should be interested in a mutual exchange of core assets, knowledge, or networks.

Businesses mainly support locally-focused goals, with a preference for sports and, to a lesser extent, culture. Environmental conservation, nature protection, and animal welfare are among the less common causes supported by corporate sponsorship, which means that sponsorship forms just a small percentage of the revenue of nature organisations (Overbeek and De Graaff 2010). This shows there is a great opportunity for nature managers to approach local businesses and show how they can benefit from sponsoring nature conservation initiatives.

Due to Nature Restoration Law, Water for Life Strategy, and other EU and national policies, this report may also be of interest for public sector managers of protected areas.





How nature sponsorship works

It is worth mentioning **that sponsorship can occur at various levels and is not limited to financial contribution**. Material sponsorship can involve the provision of volunteer support, expert services, or media publicity and coverage to enhance visibility and reputation of the sponsored entity. Even if this practice is usually seen in the area of sports, any for-profit or non-profit public body, such as town or state councils, can benefit by selling the name rights for parks or other natural areas. Through this opportunity, they may gain positive brand associations, capital injection, and increased customer awareness.

Sometimes, creative thinking is required to generate ideas that can attract sponsors. A notable example came in May 2017, when Moray Council in Scotland proposed

offering naming rights for new developments—such as “Asda Avenue” or “Tesco Terrace”—as a way to help address a £5 million (≈ €5.9 million) budget shortfall.

It is clear that corporations can get huge benefits, such as subsidies or tax breaks, from sponsoring nature restoration projects. Maintaining relevance and visibility is a brand’s number one priority in such a competitive framework. Therefore, the main benefit for them is not necessarily related to increasing ROI (return on investment), but to reminding consumers of brand presence. Recognition can translate into brand preference when considering which product to purchase.

When using sponsorships, the sponsor can get “free advertising”. Although corporate partners pay to support a nature restoration project for a specific period, their

name will be mentioned numerous times in media outlets such as websites, newspapers, and magazines, and on the TV and radio when news or events related to the named location are covered.

Naming sponsorships or brand licensing (e.g. WWF logos on ecological products, as presented below), in particular, offer greater opportunities for sponsors to engage with consumers. The most successful marketing campaigns enhance consumer experiences and foster emotional connections with the brand, often leading to increased consumer loyalty. In this case, a positive experience with the product would be closely associated with the sponsor brand’s image.





Figure: Example of WWF brand licensing¹

When seeking sponsors, it is important to consider the different types of sponsors and the specific ways they can support the organisation. Sponsorships are considered as collaborations on a continuum, and are divided into **three stages**, moving from sponsors to partners: **philanthropic, transactional, and integrative**.

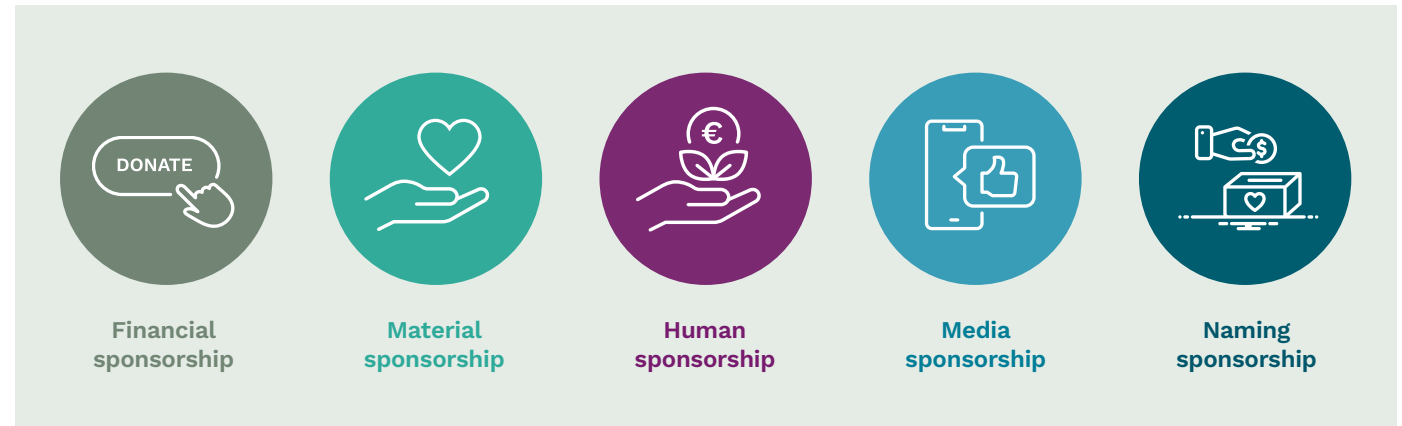
For each event or project, multiple sponsorship packages can be offered, each with varying levels of investment and associated benefits. Depending on the project, some may be more suitable than others. It is also possible to secure more than one type of sponsorship at a time.

The zoo of Barcelona,² for example, provides three levels of sponsoring opportunities for organisations wishing to demonstrate their commitment towards biodiversity and the environment. The highest-tier “Gold” sponsorship even offers reports and photographs of the animal species they have supported. Similarly, the Antwerp Zoo in Belgium³ offers a corporate sponsorship program, with investment levels ranging from €1.500 to €9.000.

Through such sponsorships, brands and individuals can contribute to the maintenance of the zoo animals and support the zoo’s participation in research, conservation, and education projects aimed at protecting threatened wildlife. The same approach used by zoos can be applied more broadly to protected natural areas.

¹ <https://www.ocado.com/products/the-cheeky-panda-sustainable-bamboo-balsam-tissue-635460011>
² <https://www.zoobarcelona.cat/en/collabora/sponsor-me>
³ <https://www.zooantwerpen.be/en/sponsorship-for-companies>

Let’s now explore the different types of sponsorships and how they can be structured.



Sponsorships can take multiple forms, such as human, material, media, financial, or naming-based, depending on the project’s needs and the sponsor’s capacity. The table below summarises each type, what it entails, how it can be structured, and examples of practical application for restoration managers to consider.

Type of sponsorship	What is it	How to structure It	Example
Financial	Direct monetary support in exchange for brand visibility.	Tiered packages with media coverage, event branding, signage, and logo presence.	Park entrance branding, event sponsorships, campaign co-branding.
Material	Provision of goods or services instead of money.	Align sponsor’s products with project needs; define visibility (e.g. logos on donated items).	Computers donated for park office, food/beverages for park events.
Human (volunteer/expert)	Company staff or public-sector employees provide time and expertise.	Schedule engagements with clear roles; promote sponsor visibility via uniforms, banners.	Corporate volunteer days, technical assistance from partner companies.
Media	Sponsors provide or pay for media coverage and advertisement.	Guarantee sponsor’s brand exposure in all communication materials.	Local newspaper ads, radio mentions, sponsored content on social media.
Naming	Sponsor’s name becomes part of the location or event.	Exclusive, long-term deals; logo featured prominently on signage and materials.	"Company X Nature Trail," benches or equipment with sponsor plaques.



These categories are not mutually exclusive and can often be combined for greater impact. For example, a naming rights sponsor may also contribute media exposure or in-kind services. Structuring sponsorships with clarity and flexibility helps maximise their appeal to different types of partners. Below we will dive deeper into each one of those **categories**.

Financial sponsorship

Economic or financial sponsorship is the most well-known type of sponsorship. **It involves providing a fixed amount of money in exchange for publicity in the sponsored places or during events.** Publicity may take various forms across different media and platforms, such as social media accounts, invitations, film screenings, official programmes, press releases, and presence of the logo in the promotional material of the sponsored event. Thanks to contributions from different financial sponsors, a significant portion of the project's budget can be covered.

Material sponsorship

This is also known as in-kind sponsorship. It functions similarly to financial sponsorship, but **instead of providing money, the sponsor contributes goods or services that are needed by the protected area, possibly during the implementation of a specific project.** For example, a computer company might offer computers for a nature park, while a soft drink brand might donate a certain number of cans of beverage for an event organised by the natural area (e.g. a day for volunteers to clean the park). It serves to cover the material needs of the organisers.

Human sponsorship

In addition to financial and material support, human resources are often essential for a successful event or project. **A company can become a sponsor of any event by providing human resources.** They can do so in the form of volunteers, technicians, or experts. These are employees that the sponsoring company temporarily assigns to the project. Importantly, their salaries continue to be paid by the sponsoring company, making their

time and effort a valuable contribution to the project's success.

This type of sponsorship can also be applied to municipalities, where local government employees contribute their time or skills to support conservation initiatives. However, it is still uncommon for nature managers to actively engage municipalities in seeking this form of in-kind or human resource sponsorship.

Media sponsorship

One of the keys to a project's success, and to the visibility of all its sponsors, is effective media coverage. **Media sponsorship finances and guarantees the media coverage of the project and its events.** This can include advertisements in local media, billboard placements, recorded advertisements, etc. In return, the sponsor's logo is prominently displayed across these media channels.

Naming sponsorship

If a protected area is very popular, or an event is promising and has strong prospects, a large number of potential sponsors may be interested in sponsoring it, especially companies seeking to associate their brand with the event. In such cases, multiple sponsorship tiers can be created (e.g. main sponsor, secondary sponsors, collaborators), each offering different advantages for the company, such as larger or more prominent logo exposure. Companies willing to pay a higher amount for a prominent placement may become top sponsors with more privileges.

If a company decides to use naming rights to promote their brand in natural areas, there are endless possibilities involving applying the brand name on billboards, buildings, parks, equipment, furniture, or anywhere else accepted by the entity managing the area.

Nature sponsorship can boost revenues for both the sponsored and the sponsoring entity: the sponsored entity receives the sponsorship funds, while the sponsoring one gains advertising exposure through the named facility.

Another example of nature sponsorship involves a new collaboration between Rewilding Europe and the for-purpose venture EarthToday which allows anyone to sponsor rewilding land in the Greater Côa Valley, a region in northern Portugal. The overall aim of this venture is to accelerate the conservation and restoration of wild nature. Visitors to the EarthToday site are able to sponsor a piece of land in the Greater Côa Valley rewilding area. Beyond land sponsorship, the site offers community-driven content focused on social and environmental issues.⁴

Given the potential benefits of sponsorship, it is important to have a well-designed and effectively-communicated strategy behind the sponsorship. It is not enough to simply attach a name to a landmark. The decision to associate with an asset must align with the company's objectives, brand, and marketing strategy. It is also desirable to share values and images.

For some companies, sponsorship can be more attractive as it is more cost-efficient and better suited to the target group. It is more focused on the local community, which can make it more attractive to local businesses, and it offers participants the opportunity to promote their company name, logo, and products. If you are interested in how to engage local communities, MERLIN has published several papers and documents on how to do it successfully. You can also visit the MERLIN Academy website, where you can find several webinars that cover these topics.

When sponsorship is linked to an event, advertising can last for weeks, months, or even years, depending on the nature of the event. This can include extensive exposure and visibility to the target audience most important to the brand. All advertising includes the company's name and logo, from online banners to print and radio ads to television spots for specific events. Moreover, for high-profile events, brands can also get media coverage through public relations. For major events, press releases are sent out regularly to build momentum for the event and raise awareness in the community.

⁴ <https://rewilding-portugal.com/news/new-collaboration-offers-a-unique-way-to-support-rewilding/>

The process of recruiting sponsors involves **several steps. This includes finding the best sponsorship option, contacting the sponsor, and negotiating the terms of the contract.** Although this may seem a simple process, the negotiations are often intense, as they include many details. That is why it is possible to terminate the sponsorship agreement prematurely. **The reasons for ending the naming sponsorship may differ.**

→ **End of term.** Naming rights are sold for a given period of time; when this term ends, and if there is no extension, the agreement and the naming rights are terminated.

→ **Bankruptcy.** Naming sponsorships may come to an end if the sponsor is no longer able to pay its debts, and, thus, cannot pay the amount of the sponsorship.

→ **Scandals.** Corporate scandals may lead to the end of naming sponsorships. One of the reasons for choosing to be named after a specific company is to build a positive image. Thus, if the sponsor is involved in a controversy, it can damage the image of the named entity. The Spanish Real Sociedad football club, for example, announced in 2018 that [Qbao.com](#) would definitively cease to be its main sponsor, after the Chinese firm had been accused of alleged pyramid schemes and up to 11 of its employees had been arrested.



Pros and cons of sponsorships

✓ Advantage of sponsorships (PROs)

- Positive brand associations
- Capital injection
- Increased customer awareness

✗ Disadvantages of sponsorships (CONS)

- Loss of regional identity
- Name inappropriateness
- Economic considerations

Although sponsorships provide significant benefits to the sponsor and the sponsored entity, the deal may not turn out as expected. There have been countless cases of sponsor agreements that have had to be broken due to the sponsor acquiring a bad image, indirectly causing a bad image for the named entity. The same risk applies when the sponsored entity develops a negative reputation, prompting sponsors to distance themselves to avoid being associated with it. Upon arrival at the venue, the entire venue is may be branded with the sponsor's brand and logo. All posters, banners, bags, t-shirts, and other promotional materials will may be branded. The longer the event, the greater the risk.

In addition, criticism from residents tends to be very loud. Indeed, the residents who are against any type of nature sponsoring very frequently consider it to represent a loss of regional identity, and argue that the necessary money can be obtained in other ways without having to sell part of what represents the citizens.

Of course, many sponsorship agreements turn out very successful, as is highlighted through this report. For example, the partnership between the National Trust and Sky mentioned later on this report enhanced Sky's environmental image through tree planting and net-zero campaigns; and Pembrokeshire Coast National Park raised €600 per gate sponsorship, helping fund trail maintenance without relying on uncertain grants.

Expected time to set up a sponsorship agreement

Initiating a sponsorship agreement will take enough time for the prospect sponsor to decide that they are willing to invest in the project, and also whether it will be composed of an asset, program, event sponsorship, or a naming right.

There is not an exact way to determine how much time it will take to close the agreement, since different interests are in play in each situation. However, it can be assumed that the larger the amount of money involved in the sponsorship, the longer it will take to be closed since the negotiation phase and the writing of the legal document will be more complex.

Factors that may determine the length of the agreement according to the Center of Excellence for Public Sector Marketing¹ include:

- **How unique is the opportunity?** Does it offer something that can't be obtained anywhere else? A more attractive opportunity for the sponsor will lead to fast completion due to their willingness to get the offer.
- **Is there a good fit** between the potential sponsor and the natural area/event, or has the sponsor been contacted just because it is another name in the phone book? The better the fit between the project and the sponsor, the lower the time needed to complete the agreement.

- **Are the sponsor's business objectives being met?** Does the sponsor see good value in the sponsorship, or could they get the same somewhere else for less money? The more objectives met, the less time needed.
- **Is the sponsor motivated?** Is there some level of "pain" that will be solved by the solution you are offering? The bigger the motivation, the less the time spent on completing the agreement.
- **How much money are you asking for?** Do they have enough cash available to spend this year, or must they go through a budget cycle to secure the funds? As said above, the higher the amount of money involved, the more complex the agreement, and the more time required.
- **Who needs to be involved in the decision?** Do funds need to be pulled from multiple departments, and do they each need to be involved in the process? The more evaluation the agreement needs, the longer it takes to close the deal. If you will be talking directly with decision makers, chances are that the deal will take less time to be concluded.
- **What is the duration of the agreement?** Multi-year agreements require more scrutiny because they commit a company for the long-term.
- **Are they familiar with you and your program?** The less they know about you or your nature protected area, the longer it will take for them to gather information and make their decision.

Overall, the most costly phase in terms of time when acquiring sponsorships is closing the deal. Indeed, **meetings with the potential sponsors and proposing the project could last from 1 to 3 months**, depending on the fit between the proposal and the sponsors.

Then, if the proposal is accepted by the sponsors, the legal agreement must be written, a process that involves negotiating its terms and conditions. Depending on the different factors mentioned above, **the negotiation phase can take from 1 month to a year**.

Approval processes for sponsorships can vary significantly, depending on the sponsoring organisation and the sponsor individuals. As a result, **approval timelines may range from as little as one week to as long as two months, or sometimes up to six months**.

As emphasised in Connectology seminars, it is crucial to assign the task of securing sponsorships to team members with an entrepreneurial mindset and strong problem-solving skills. Delegating this responsibility to passive or overly bureaucratic individuals is likely to lead to poor outcomes, often resulting in the mistaken conclusion that no sponsors are available. If your team lacks a member who fits this profile, it is advisable to recruit the right people before initiating sponsor outreach.

¹ Bernie Colterman (2017) Center of excellence for public sector marketing. How Long Does it Take to Secure a Sponsor? | CEPSM

Looking for a sponsor

1 to 3 months

Negotiating the deal

1 month to 1 year

Approval

1 week to 2 months

Prerequisites to implement a sponsorship initiative

In order to be more successful in striking a sponsorship agreement there are some key elements that you need to take into consideration. Here is a checklist with those critical elements:

Key elements checklist

- + Well-designed, and with a clear communication strategy
- + Alignment with company's objective, goal, brand, marketing
- + Shared values and image
- + Shown cost efficiency
- + Explanation of how sponsorships can complement EU Biodiversity Strategy 2030, Nature Restoration Law, or other EU or national laws

Naturally, a key prerequisite for launching a successful sponsorship initiative is having a capable team in place to deliver the project. It is equally important to ensure that your team includes individuals with energy, initiative, and an entrepreneurial mindset. **One important aspect of sponsorship is the issue of tax, and it is a prerequisite that you study this issue before you try to find sponsors.**

Before signing an agreement, it is important to thoroughly study the planned partnership with the sponsor, not only in terms of deliverables but also in terms of tax. This applies to both the non-profit organisation receiving the sponsorship and the sponsoring company. For both parties, neglected agreements or inadequate implementation of any agreement can lead to undesirable tax consequences or unmet expectations. Such mistakes can

quickly cost considerable sums of money and affect potential future sponsoring opportunities.

A particular challenge regarding donations and sponsorship, for instance in German law, is to reconcile the interests of the sponsor and the beneficiary organisation. These can be very different. The sponsor may have an interest in organising contributions in the form of sponsorships so that the funds can be considered as operating expenses for his company. The beneficiary may wish to receive the funds tax-free if possible, in which case a donation is usually the best solution. Fortunately, it is often possible to reconcile the different interests of the sponsor and the recipient.

The Value Added Tax (VAT) classification of sponsorships is also often problematic. For example, advertising services provided by non-profit organisations in Germany may be subject to the standard rate of 19% or the reduced rate of 7%.

The legislation relating to sponsorship is not only complex and incomplete, but also leaves room for interpretation. For example, many non-profit organisations have chosen to transfer advertising rights to third parties, or even their subsidiary, in exchange for a fee. However, exploiting these opportunities requires a legally and fiscally sound sponsorship concept, to which all corporate partnerships should subscribe.

The key point is that the legal framework should be examined in advance to avoid tax problems for both the sponsor and the beneficiary.



How to implement a sponsorship initiative

The process of completing a sponsorship agreement might be long and tedious. It takes multiple considerations, as well as provisions that must be checked throughout. As a result, the process can involve several steps, including securing the necessary support of external bodies. **The process can be separated into three phases: considering the fundraising opportunity, contacting potential sponsors, and creating the agreement.**



Consider the funding opportunity and other funding options

Before deciding to sell the rights to advertise in an area or to use billboards inside your natural area to a sponsor, several factors must be considered. In fact, this type of sponsorship should not be the first choice of funding if you know the local inhabitants or activists will have concerns; for example, if they consider sponsorship as an identity theft, or oppose the privatisation of public areas.

To begin, choose carefully which of the public areas inside the natural area would be offered for sponsoring. Questions that should be asked in making the choice include: Which areas would suffer from any type of sponsoring (e.g. billboards)? What are the key assets in terms of biodiversity? Has it been recently renovated? Is it still a popular place? How many people visit annually, and how many are expected to visit in the future? Are there plans for expansion? Have those plans been approved by local authorities? The answers to these questions will determine the viability of the selected area.

Sponsoring contracts tend to be long. If a 10-year contract is signed, but in 3 years it has to be cancelled or revised because of its age, the seller could be in breach of contract.

In addition, the sponsor will be looking for a popular and important area where their name is relevant. Therefore, selling the name of a popular site may attract public dissatisfaction.

One way to mitigate this risk, highlighted in Connectology’s Zero Risk for Natural Areas sessions, is to visit similar protected areas where sponsorship is already in place. Learning from their experience can provide valuable insights and practical guidance.

Another effective approach is to start small and gradually expand the scope of sponsorship. For example, if you successfully engage a company to provide staff for a two-week river clean-up, the local community may be more receptive if that same company later sponsors a birdwatching hut.

The legal aspects of the sponsoring rights of the sponsor must also be taken into account. In the contract, exclusivity provisions should be offered to the sponsor to further sweeten the deal. These clauses prevent local competition from sponsoring

and/or advertising in a way that detracts from the naming rights of the sponsor.

Finally, sponsorship payments are not always made up front and in total. The sponsor may make payments in instalments over the duration of the agreement, so receiving the money may take longer than expected.

Contacting potential sponsors

Presenting sponsorship opportunities to potential sponsors is a crucial phase in the process, since it reveals the real interest of corporations in the possibility of naming public facilities (e.g. Natural area Visitor Centre) and, thus, the potential success of the fundraising opportunity. Meetings should be arranged with the possible sponsors that are most related to the potential sponsored organisation.

Nevertheless, the contacting phase should not be restricted to known and already-related corporations. Indeed, through the internet it is possible to contact many other possible sponsors that can deliver the same value as those previously contacted. **Companies can use sites such as “Looking for Sponsor”¹ to look for items, spaces, or locations to bid on and to publicise their name.** Crowdfunder-based “Projects for Nature” and Kent Wildlife Trust’s “Sponsor a Reserve” are also both popular platforms through which donors and nature preservation organisations can connect.

While presenting an opportunity to potential sponsors, it is important to address their needs to not lose their interest in the project. For example, it should be noted if they are philanthropists or are trying to build brand awareness. Then, if what is driving their interest is known, you should focus on what the sponsor considers crucial. Usually, they pay attention to the following:

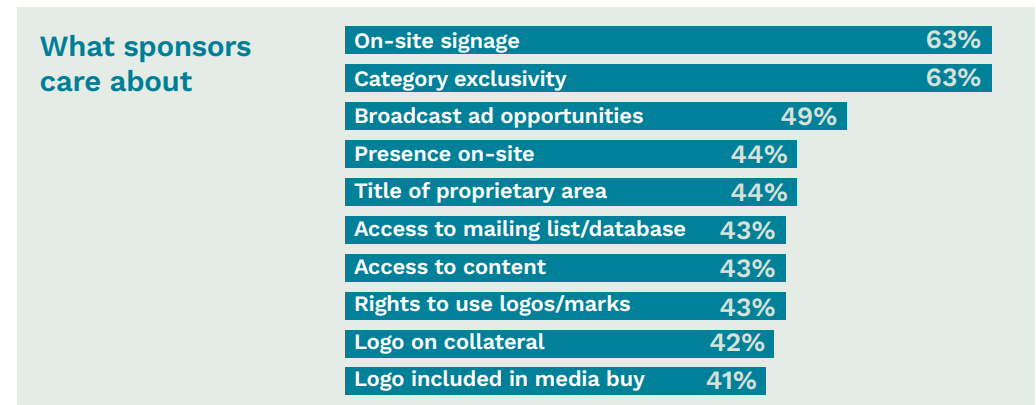


Figure 1: What sponsors are seeking. Source: Insane Impact²

¹ <https://lookingforsponsor.com/>

² <https://insaneimpact.com/increase-sponsorship-revenue/>



Close the deal

Once a buyer has been identified for the naming rights of a public space or facility, such as a birdwatching hut, the next step is to formalise the arrangement through a sponsorship agreement.

This phase of the process is very complex and detailed, as it involves taking into account various legal aspects and defending the interests of each party. This legal agreement negotiates the terms and conditions of the deal, involving sponsorship benefits, duration, location for logos, rules, payment terms, and termination rights.

Sponsorship benefits	Duration	Sponsors name and logo
Rules	Payment terms	Termination rights

Sponsorship benefits and linking monitoring with restoration benefits

This section of the formal agreement should state the full benefits and rights associated with the sponsorship, including the restoration goals that are expected to be achieved under the sponsorship agreement. Moreover, the agreement is not legally binding until the deal has been signed; this gives the sponsor the ability to change the name if they've found something better.

Choosing the type of sponsorship may cause disagreement between the sponsor's lawyers and the sponsored party's lawyers. Discussion of competing versions of the space's naming rights agreement usually follows.

In addition, the sponsor will want more benefits than just their name displayed in the public facility. The following may well be among the items up for negotiation:

- Use of the natural area's name and logo in the sponsor's literature and advertisements.
- Provision of a certain number of advantages to allow the sponsor to offer corporate hospitality to its clients.
- The right to use the natural area's database of supporters for marketing purposes (subject always to compliance with data protection legislation).
- Free access to the nature park for the sponsor's clients. For example, if your natural area charges an entrance fee of €5, a sponsor, such as a telecommunications company like Vodafone, may wish to offer complimentary access to the park as an exclusive benefit for their customers.

Beyond promotional value, many sponsors are interested in supporting projects that demonstrate measurable impact. Therefore, including monitoring systems (e.g., biodiversity indicators, carbon metrics, water quality tracking) in sponsorship packages can be an attractive component. **These monitoring efforts help track restoration benefits and co-benefits such as:**

- Carbon sequestration (relevant to sponsors with climate-neutrality targets)
- Biodiversity gains (important for nature-positive commitments)
- Flood and drought mitigation (especially in areas where businesses or supply chains are exposed)
- Recreational and educational value, which can be reported to stakeholders and customers

Providing sponsors with annual or semi-annual impact reports that include monitoring data, visual documentation, and co-benefit assessments can strengthen long-term collaboration and justify premium sponsorship tiers.

Nature organisations may, in turn, be interested in the resources and skills of the sponsoring companies. For example, companies can provide financial resources and business know-how to improve marketing strategies, expand the networks of conservation NGO members, and to raise awareness.

Interest in a mutual exchange of core assets, knowledge, or networks is essential for a successful collaboration.

Core assets refers to the financial contribution of businesses, and to the communication strategies of nature organisations to influence consumer decisions. **Knowledge** is broadly defined and may refer to the image and ecological expertise of nature organisations, and also to the commercial and production expertise of businesses. **Human resources** refers to the employees of the businesses and the nature organisations. **Exchange of networks** may concern the consumers who buy products and services from the businesses, and the members of the other party involved.

	Businesses	NGOS
Core asset	Finances, products, services	Images, communication, services
Knowledge	Commercial, sector	Ecological, societal
Human resources	Employees	Employees, volunteers
Networks	Consumers	Members

Table 1: Stakeholders (Source: Overbeek³)

Duration

Another important term for the contract is how long the sponsoring deal will apply. The duration of the rights will vary depending on the type of project or activity being sponsored and the interests of both parties.

According to Re:wild (2021), nine private funders joined together to pledge \$5 billion (about €4.28 million) to ensure 30 percent of the planet will be protected and preserved, targeting the most important places for biodiversity. The agreement, which involved various local communities, civil society, and governments, is set to last over 10 years.

Moreover, contracts may be made on a yearly basis, with the option to be renewed every year. In this case, the option to renew it may be granted to one party or both parties, depending on the agreed negotiation terms.

3 Overbeek, G. (2011). From sponsor to partner: NGO-business alliances that support nature conservation in the Netherlands. Taylor & Francis. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/1943815X.2011.608071>



Sponsors name and logo

Clearly, sponsoring rights are a great source of marketing for the sponsor. Thus, naming rights also include signage displaying the new name of the public space, whether on equipment in a natural park, on a bridge, benches, boats, or other locations. As a result, the sponsorship agreement must include specifications as to what extent the sponsor's name and logo will be shown, that is, where in the facility's interior and exterior the signage will be placed.

The sponsor will want to ensure that such signage is highly prominent to visitors and spectators. The sponsor's package is very likely to include rights to advertising on perimeter boards and the inclusion of the sponsor's name and logos on entrance tickets to nature parks, for example.

Rules

Some ground rules must be set in the agreement. These rules are essential for the responsible usage of the name and the faithful future relations of the engaged parties.

The first rule to take into account relates to intellectual property. It must be clear when the sponsored party is enabled to use the name and logos, and it must be clear which licenses or trademarks have been granted.

Moreover, the sponsor will want to ensure that the sponsored organisation does not grant sponsorships to competitors; particularly conflicting sponsorships within the named facility.

Finally, even if the sponsor is not expecting to want to change the name of the public space, it is still a good idea to include rules about changing it anyway. This clause would detail to which extent name changes are allowed. The clause could also specify the approval period for name changes (such as 30 or 60 days). It is crucial to mention who will be in charge of covering the cost of changing the logos and advertisements, included in the public space, for the previous name. Perhaps the sponsored entity may agree to pay for a name change that they themselves suggested, but the sponsor would have to pay if they choose the changed logo or name.

Payment terms

In exchange for the naming rights, the sponsor will agree to pay a certain sum. That sum should be disclosed in the agreement, as should the payment terms.

It hardly needs to be said that payment terms will be central to any agreement. The seller will be looking for as much cash upfront as possible, with increased payments payable in the event of success. The sponsor will want payments by instalments, with reduced payments in the event of not meeting the expected results.

Some sponsors may prefer to pay a lump sum upfront, while others may opt for fractional payments. In the latter case, the full payment schedule, including expected payment dates, should be clearly outlined in the contract. If payments are to be made in instalments, this must be explicitly specified.

In addition, sponsorship agreements can include both a fixed amount (regardless of the payment method) and a variable component. The variable fee can be tied to performance indicators, such as the number of visitors or sum of revenue generated from the sponsor's products sold within the natural area. For instance, a beverage company may agree to share a percentage of its on-site sales with the park's managing entity.

Termination rights

Towards the end of the contract, there should be a well-defined and detailed clause on termination rights, given the potentially significant consequences of ending the agreement.

Either party may want the right to terminate the agreement quickly in a number of situations. These typically could include:

- Insolvency of the other party
- Breach of the agreement

However, there are many other situations in which termination may be possible. As a result, a list of the terms that would legally allow exiting the contract without recourse should be established. For example, if the sponsor is late on payments, a clause could be applied that allows a late payment once, but raises

the interest or charges extra for each subsequent late payment. If a sponsor is late to pay X number of times, then, the sponsored party could be allowed to terminate the contract.

The contract could also include a termination clause if the actions of one party are likely to damage the other's reputation. So, for instance, you will want to terminate if the entity that is sponsoring your natural area uses child labour or has become embroiled in corruption. Such morality clauses are often the subject of a detailed article in their own right.

If there are many situations in which either party may be willing to terminate the contract, this part of the contract will be lengthier and more complex.

While closing on the agreement, it is important to evaluate the name that is being selected. The name, logo, or image must fulfil the criteria established by the sponsored organisation, as well as meeting the expectations of the local community, including visitors to the natural area. The evaluation implies:

- i) All naming rights arrangements must be evaluated against established criteria. The owner of the public space (e.g. the nature park managing entity) may seek the expertise of an external firm to assess the costs and benefits of the proposal.
- ii) When evaluating naming rights opportunities, the potential sponsored entity's directors should take into account the following **factors**:
 - Whether the potential sponsored entity has adequate resources (both staff and financial) to fully capitalise on the naming rights arrangement without compromising the effective delivery of restoration and nature maintenance services and objectives.
 - Whether the naming rights opportunity contributes positively to the natural area's image.
 - Whether the opportunity aligns with and takes into consideration existing naming rights arrangements.
 - Whether the potential sponsor maintains a good reputation.

Consulting entities supporting natural areas sponsorship

Since there are several steps in the process of sponsorship, external professionals may offer significant support to successful implementation. Indeed, a lack of knowledge and experience regarding this type of financing opportunity may cause the natural areas to miss various beneficial opportunities, or to make errors in the text of the deal. As a result, lawyers and consulting firms may be crucial in closing a naming sponsorship agreement.

To avoid any misunderstanding: we are not suggesting that it is impossible to attract sponsors to your area or initiative without the support of lawyers, specialised agencies, or consultants. If you feel that you have a large in-house team with experience in getting sponsors, and the team has the energy and knowledge to fully implement a sponsorship initiative for your natural area, please go ahead. The decision to hire external help may be reconsidered if the agreement fails.

Let's now address the different type of individuals or entities that can support your sponsorship initiative.

Lawyers

In the complex task of defining the naming rights contract, hiring lawyers will make the contract more detailed and prevent either party from facing an illegal practice or misunderstanding with the other party. Lawyers will ensure that the agreement is completely legal and legally binding for both parties.

Since each country has its own legal framework, it is advisable to work with a lawyer who is well-versed in national legislation and has experience in drafting sponsorship agreements. We do not provide a list of recommended lawyers, as this would require including at least one qualified firm from each EU member state, which is not practical in this document.

Consulting firms

Hiring a consultant can be valuable not only for successfully presenting the project to the sponsors, but also to decide which of the public assets' rights are to be sold. Despite natural areas being a relatively niche consulting market, there are still a few distinct firms which are known leaders in securing sponsors, even though said firms might not explicitly advertise that expertise. Some consulting firms are more specialised in evaluating the impact on biodiversity of setting up facilities in natural areas, or evaluating the total cost of ownership of some facilities. Here is a list of these specialised entities.

Naturally, a consulting firm's previous experience with sponsorship deals and corporate partners makes it a valuable asset in securing naming rights agreements. Such firms can help identify the most suitable potential sponsors and advise on how to approach them effectively, ensuring that both the outreach strategy and presentation are tailored to maximise interest and engagement.

Name of the consulting firm	Telephone number and contact email	Website
SLR Consulting Global Leaders in Sustainability Solutions	Phone: +44 (0) 118 950 0761 Email: info@slrconsulting.com	www.slrconsulting.com
Cumulus Consultants Ltd Fresh perspectives for managing land and natural capital	Phone: +44 (0) 1386 277 970 Email: info@cumulus-consultants.co.uk	cumulus-consultants.co.uk
Apex Ecology Specialist Ecological Consultancy Surveys	Phone: +44 (0) 1782 346494 Email: enquiries@apexecology.com	apexecology.com
Wildscapes CIC Environmental & Ecological Consultants	Phone: +44 (0) 114 303 5123 Email: info@wildscapes.co.uk	wildscapes.co.uk
ERO Resources	Phone: +1 303-830-1188 Email: ero@eroresources.com Address: 1626 Cole Boulevard, Suite 100, Lakewood, CO 80401	www.eroresources.com
Biodiversify Sustainability Consultancy	Email: info@biodiversify.com Address: Sustainable Ventures, County Hall, Belvedere Rd, London SE1 7PB	biodiversify.com

Table 2: Consulting entities supporting natural areas sponsorship



Moreover, by means of their research methods, consulting firms are able to understand the needs and interests of sponsors, along with citizens' preferences (based on how they view different public spaces). They are able, as a result, to choose the right facility to sell its rights. They may also suggest creating a new facility to be sponsored (e.g. a childrens' playground).

They can also be helpful when deciding the price for the sale by acting as if they were appraisers and valuing the facility. In this process, they would determine the reach implied by naming a space by measuring how many people would be aware of the name and respond positively to it. Then, depending on the benefits that it would offer to the sponsor, they would decide the range of prices.

Some consulting companies more specialised in fundraising and natural areas sponsorships include:

Name of the consulting firm	Telephone number and contact email	Website
Abbey Solutions International Charity & NGO Consultants	Phone: +44 (0) 207 859 4701 Email: gosia@abbeyolutions.co.uk	abbeyolutions.co.uk
Fundraising Consultants, Strategic Consultants Wootton George Consulting	Phone: 01903 723519 Email: info@wgconsulting.co.uk	www.wgconsulting.co.uk
Stone Soup Consulting	Phone: +351 912 318 724 Email: stone-soup@stone-soup.net	stone-soup.net
Compton Fundraising Consultants Ltd	Phone: 01926 614 555 Email: info@comptonfundraising.co.uk	www.comptonfundraising.co.uk

Table 3: Consulting companies more specialised in fundraising and natural areas sponsorships include

Implementation costs

Before you decide to start a sponsorship initiative, you must be aware of the cost structure that is required to develop and implement such an initiative.

Attorney Fees

Attorney fees can vary depending on the region, experience of the lawyers, and size of the deal.

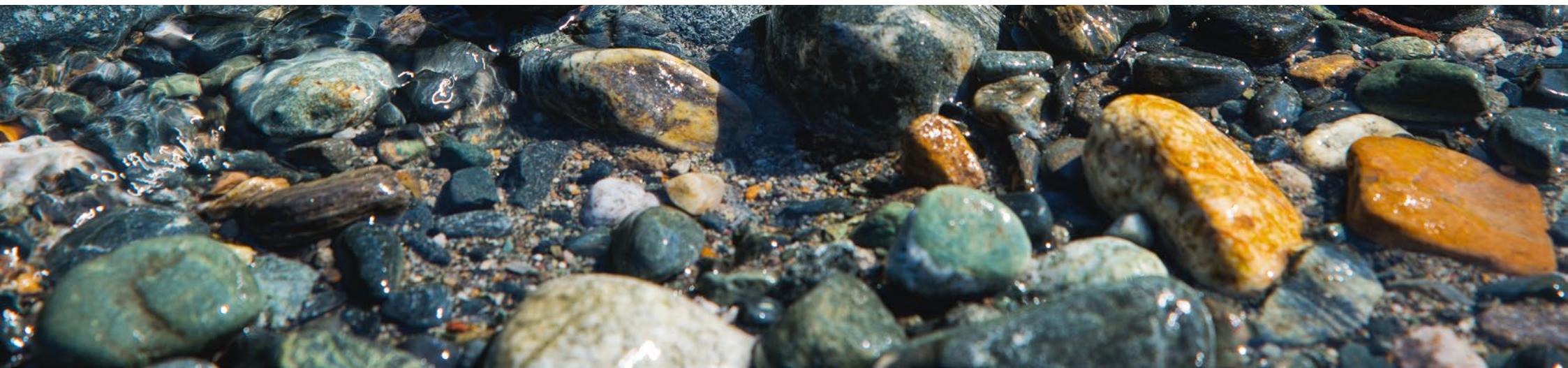
If the restoration manager doesn't have an in-house lawyer, it should consider between 1% and 5% of the sponsorship value to be paid as legal fees. Before hiring an external lawyer, try to reach out to your community of users or friends in the field of natural areas to find out if there is an experienced lawyer who could volunteer their time to support you.

If you need to hire an external lawyer, try to agree to a small fixed amount fee (retainer) and a variable so as to reduce your risk.

Consulting Firm Fees

These vary by region, depending on the experience of the consulting firm and if there are retainers or if it is fully the success fee.

Many consulting firms accept work on the success fee, which means that the restoration project manager doesn't need to pay any amount up front to the consulting firm.



Best practice recommendations

We will cover now some of the best practices that you may consider following.

Know your needs in terms of budget and the financial capacity of potential sponsors

Sponsorship agreements involve lengthy contracts that will bind the sponsoring entity and the sponsored entity for a long period of time, so naming rights need to be time-bound and also must consider whether any public pushback will occur. Moreover, they require complying with strict and complex provisions that will restrict not only the present, but also the future of both parties' paths. This must all be taken into account when considering if the presented funding opportunity is the one that best fits the nature restoration project.

To select the most appropriate funding option, it is essential to forecast the total financial and material resources required for the nature restoration project. It is advisable to engage an auditor or accountant to review the project manager's current financial position, assess the present and projected value of assets, and evaluate the feasibility of alternative funding sources. This will help determine the precise amount of funding needed to successfully implement the project.

Moreover, it is not desirable to enter into a contract that will not be fulfilled as a result of the sponsor's bankruptcy. A hired auditor will be able to conduct an external audit to examine and verify the accuracy of the sponsor's financial statements, assessing its management processes, its accounts, and all accounting information.

Choose the public space smartly

It has been previously commented that several sponsoring agreements have been criticised by the population for selling the name of important places, thus changing the history, values, or identity of a location. In addition, rights have been sold for sites which had to be abandoned before the end of the contract. It is also important to assess the biodiversity values that may be affected by an increase in visitors or building a new facility inside a natural area.

All this implies the need to carry out a study before entering into negotiations. **The study should involve knowing the value attributed by the citizens to the space, as well as the real value of the space, including the expected lifetime. Then, taking all these factors into account, the space that best accommodates these constraints should be chosen to be sponsored.** The study could be carried out by a specialised consultancy company or individual, to find out the value it has in relation to the citizens, and by an auditor, to ascertain the monetary value of the space.

Negotiate wisely

For non-profit organisations that derive a large part of their funding from fundraising, offering different types of sponsorship can be a good incentive for sponsors. However, when negotiating and offering specific opportunities, the organisation should focus on the short- as well as the long-term implications, both for the individual or corporate donor and for the wider fundraising activities of the organisation. **Carefully drafted contractual provisions often help to avoid ambiguity and potential conflict; at best, they ensure that the organisation respects the donor's wishes while retaining sufficient flexibility to receive similar major gifts or sign other sponsorship agreements in the future.** As a result, the use of a lawyer in the negotiating phase is essential. While negotiating, the following practices are advisable:

→ Introduce a sponsoring policy

Although not required by law, non-profit organisations that grant sponsoring rights to donors should consider adopting an organisational policy that provides consistent guidelines and practices regarding naming opportunities. These provisions could be part of a broader donor acceptance policy or a separate organisational document. If this document is not agreed upon by the key stakeholders within your organisation, you may encounter unexpected internal obstacles when it comes time to finalise the sponsorship package.

→ Define naming and promotion expectations

The sponsorship agreements should specify how the names and logos will be displayed or used publicly. For example, for a physical display, that is, how the name will be displayed on the front of a building or in a public space, the agreement should include a visual representation. If the sponsorship agreement leaves certain details, such as fonts and sizes, open to future decisions, document how the parties will determine these details. In addition, the non-profit organisation should consider all applicable zoning and safety regulations before agreeing on the size, type, and location of signs. Bear in mind that on some occasions you will need to ask permission from the local municipality to place a billboard inside your natural area. Potentially you will also need to pay a licensing fee or a tax to the local municipality.

→ Avoid granting perpetual or permanent rights

While donors may try to negotiate naming rights in perpetuity, non-profit organisations should think carefully about whether to accept such conditions.

By not granting perpetual rights, the organisation retains some flexibility to meet future financial needs and possibly secure future major donations. **Regardless of the approach taken, maintaining flexibility will help maximise both the long-term value of the legacy and the potential of future naming rights.**

→ Preserve termination rights

It can be difficult and controversial to remove the donor's name or separate from the donor's organisation. Therefore, the naming rights agreement should clearly state the circumstances in which sponsorship rights or naming rights can be revoked.

Successful case studies

The National Trust¹ is Europe's leading conservation charity, with over 5 million loyal members. This charity is committed to preserving historic properties, internationally acclaimed gardens, coastline, and countryside for everyone to enjoy, both now and in the future. To achieve this goal, The National Trust looks to work with like-minded companies on a variety of commercially attractive sponsorship opportunities.

The benefits of partnering with the charity are broad; indeed, a relationship with The National Trust sends out a clear message about commitment to conservation, the environment, and the preservation of nature by the sponsor. Research has shown that Trust members see commercial partnerships as a clear endorsement of the brand or product. Promotional opportunities drive sales while benefiting from a positive association with the Trust in the minds of customers.

Current partnering opportunities include:

- Major programme sponsorship top tier sponsorship packages based around key areas of the Trust's work, including Gardens, Discovery, and Outdoors
- National Trust Music Festival: twelve high profile summer concerts at four key Trust properties
- From Plot to Plate – a series of over one hundred events focusing on growing, producing, and cooking food
- Working Holidays scheme – the longest running National Trust volunteering programme, with over 4.000 participants annually

Bespoke sponsorship packages can be created to meet the sponsor's marketing objectives, but the benefits of working with The National Trust include:

- Corporate hospitality at some of the nation's most prestigious properties (many inside natural areas)
- Staff benefits, including free entry passes and an employee volunteering programme
- Association with the powerful and trusted National Trust brand

- Access to more than 5 million National Trust members
- Coverage and acknowledgement in National Trust communications
- Excellent corporate social responsibility and PR story

As part of its broader partnership efforts, The National Trust has established a collaboration with Sky, a London-based media and telecommunications company.

The National Trust, as well as Sky, are aiming to achieve net zero carbon by 2030. To get there they have launched Sky Zero, a promise to cut carbon emissions created by their business, suppliers, and use of technology products by at least 50 per cent.

Besides, Sky will be committed to inspire people to protect the natural world through its channels and shows. During the last decade, the broadcaster has been campaigning to protect rainforests and oceans – the world's most powerful carbon sinks. As a result, more than £9 million (≈ €10.39 million) were raised to protect trees in the Amazon. Sky Ocean Rescue, a campaign to raise awareness about plastic pollution in our oceans, has also encouraged millions of people to take action to improve the health of coastal places.

The partnership between The National Trust and Sky helps them to look after nature which humanity depends on. This means that The National Trust has more support to restore precious woodland, create more places for wildlife to thrive, and keep coastal places alive.

In return, Sky VIP members have the chance to win one of 35.500 National Trust single-use family day passes, so they, together with their loved ones, can spend a day exploring one of the places they are helping to look after.

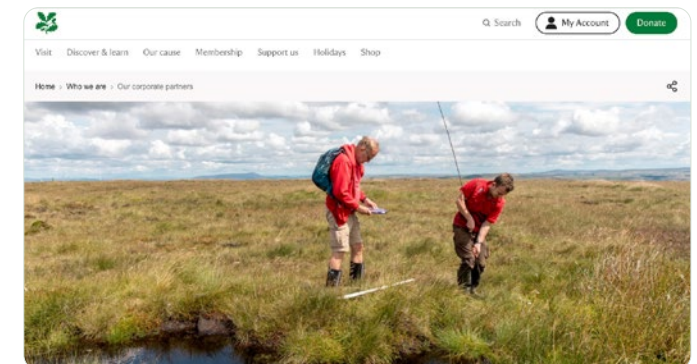
Another example of sponsorship applied to natural areas is the Pembrokeshire Coast nature park in Wales, where the names of the more than 100 gates upon the trail entrances are sold for €600 each to support the hard work that goes into maintaining that world-class landscape. These personalised plaques are displayed over a ten-year period before they are taken down, much like in The Royal Parks of England such as Hyde Park,

Kensington Gardens and the memorial benches in Westminster City Council.

Another notable successful project is the tree sponsorship program in Munich, Germany. This initiative allows individuals and companies to sponsor the planting and maintenance of trees in urban areas, contributing to the preservation of green spaces within the city. Sponsors are recognised with personalised plaques displayed on or near their sponsored trees, fostering a sense of community engagement while providing crucial funding for urban reforestation and ecological restoration.

What makes these examples successful?

- + Clear impact, with transparent and measurable nature-related benefits
- + Deployment of scalable and replicable models of ownership, looking at cost-effectiveness
- + Brand alignment, shared values and goals between entities and sponsors
- + Clear marketing benefits for sponsors, tangible brand exposure and customer engagement
- + Customisation possibilities with sponsorship packages, individualised or localised
- + Social resonance and engaging storytelling



The National Trust is Europe's leading conservation charity, with over 5 million loyal members.

¹ <https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/features/working-with-sky-to-bring-you-closer-to-the-places-you-love>

Suggested Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

Several indicators should be taken into account after having implemented a sponsorship initiative. These factors will determine the success of the financing, which will not only reflect the monetary environment but also the opinion and perspectives of citizens and other potential investors.

Let's analyse some of the most common and relevant KPIs:

Revenue

It is well known that the **main reason** for using sponsorships to finance a natural area or an initiative related to a natural area is to be able to **acquire sufficient funding to cover the management or restoration costs of a site** (e.g. a freshwater ecosystem, such as a lake or river).

Therefore, in order to evaluate the success of this type of financing, **it is necessary to analyse whether the income is sufficient to cover these expenses**. In this case, it is important to assess not only **the income generated** from the sponsor's payments, but also the **potential impact of the name change on revenue from ticket sales and other paid services offered at the site**. All in-kind contributions from sponsors that reduce your costs should probably be considered a revenue item. You should also consider the costs to build billboards, plaques, or other items promised to the sponsor.

Clearly, **the net revenue (revenue less the costs associated with the sponsorship contract) is one of the key KPIs that you must consider**.

Target market perception and behaviour

Target market perception refers to how regular visitors to the venue perceive the name change. In this section, these visitors' opinions about the director of the space (or the company managing the natural area) and the sponsor will be taken into account.

With respect to the director of the space or the project, the **approval or rejection of the visitors should be studied**. Having a good relationship with the person in charge of the space will make visiting the site more pleasant. Moreover, **when is clear that the current project will not be the last one, the support of the visitors is crucial to carrying out future projects**. Good harmony between the management and the visitors will facilitate the proposal process and acceptance of future opportunities.

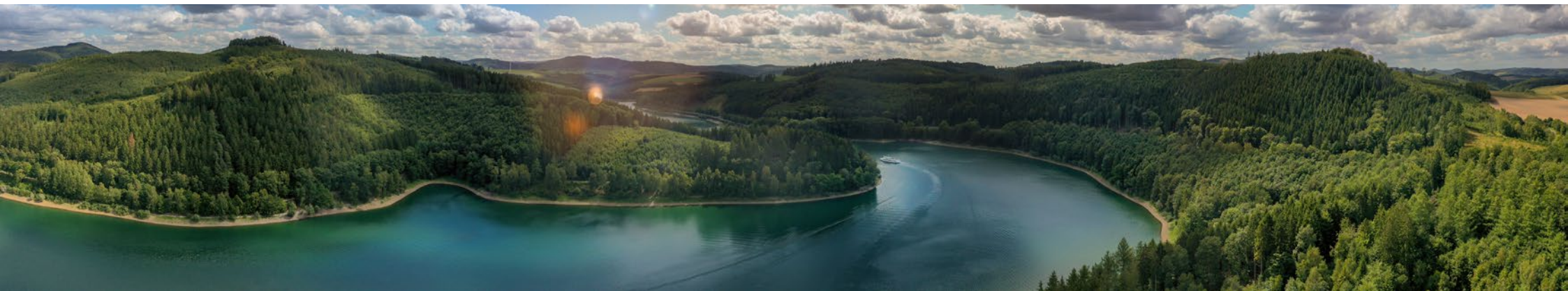
On the other hand, the visitors must also have a good image of the brand that will impose the name. If the image is bad, the appreciation of the space whose name is sold will fade away, as the image attributed to the brand will be attributed to it as well. This, as a consequence, will affect the future revenues of the project.

In view of this, it is necessary **to study the visitors' perception of the name change, since it significantly influences the behaviour of the visitors, either for better or for worse**. This type of study can be carried out by the marketing consultant hired earlier.

Value of service offered

As explained above, one of the biggest complaints against the sale of naming rights is the fear of a change of identity and values. Of course, if the naming rights are associated with just one of 50 facilities in a natural area, it probably won't have big impact. But, **if you decide to change the name of the natural area to include your sponsor's name, then you need to think twice**.

A space characterised by offering specific services linked to values, for example related to good treatment and family, may be affected by the agreements established in the contract. That is to say, the **sponsor** seeks to achieve publicity by means of this instrument, and in order to attract the maximum number of people, may **include clauses in the contract** by which the owners or managers of the space (e.g. nature park) **must advertise the sponsor, either by mentioning the brand during their services or by making use of them**. This may consequently **change the working dynamics** of the space, diverting attention **away from its values and focusing more on the advertising side**. Therefore, it is necessary to review the value of the services offered before and after closing the deal.



Conclusion

Corporate and private sponsorship is a sustainable source of funding for natural area organisations and their conservation projects. This is not only the case due to the importance these nature restoration projects have to society, but also due to their **ability to leverage a trail, bench, gate, animal, or other biodiversity assets to secure the needed resources for the project.** In other words, once legal advisors ensure that sponsorship agreements are legally and ethically reasonable, and consulting firms warrant the deals strategically logical as well as adhering to local community values, then corporate sponsorship can become a genuinely viable funding mechanism for natural areas.

Following this cautious planning process ensures partnerships among natural area managers and donors can be properly established, creating a framework in which all parties win. **Agreements like this will improve natural space functionality, and allow the public to engage more with nature.** With appropriate sponsorship agreements, nature preservation organisations could maintain the natural beauty of their reserves and our planet for generations to come.

If you're looking for inspiration to explore sponsorship and brand licensing opportunities, we encourage you to visit the WWF websites and explore the wide range of sponsorship packages and initiatives they offer.

And remember: **with an entrepreneurial mindset, anything is possible.** Your natural area will benefit from your commitment.



Glossary

Brand association	the particular opinion, thoughts, and impressions that a consumer has of a brand.	Public relations	the practice of managing and maintaining a positive public image for an organisation, company, or prominent individual.
Insolvency	a situation in which a debtor cannot pay the debts they owe.	Sponsor	an individual, company, or organisation that provides financial or in-kind support to a project or initiative, often in exchange for visibility, branding, or alignment with environmental or social goals.
Instalment payment	paying a bill in small portions throughout a fixed period of time.	Sponsorship	the role or responsibility of an individual, group, or organisation that provides support, advice, or funding to another person, group, or project.
Intellectual property	creations of the human mind – including inventions, literary and artistic works, designs, and symbols, names, or images – used in commercial activities.	Stakeholder	any individual, group, or organisation that has an interest in, or may be affected by, a project's activities, outcomes, or decisions. Stakeholders can include local communities, funders, policymakers, NGOs, and landowners.
Legal provision	a statement in a contract or a law that a specific thing must happen or be done, or not happen or not be done.	Target market	a specific group of consumers identified as the intended audience for a product or service.
Lump Sum payment	a single payment made in full rather than dividing the amount into multiple instalments.	Tax base	the total value of income, property, assets, consumption, or other economic activities on which a tax authority can impose taxes.
Naming rights	a type of advertising or sponsorship agreement in which an individual, company, or organisation pays for the privilege to name a facility, location, event, program, or object for a set period of time.	Title sponsorship	an arrangement where a sponsor provides funding, goods, or services in return for having their name featured prominently as part of the title of an event.
Naming rights agreement	a contract between two or more parties that allows one party the exclusive right to name a property, location, or event for a set period of time.		
Operating expenses	an expense a business incurs through its normal business operations.		

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