



RELATIONSHIPS WITH REWARDS

Developing successful lettings and funding initiatives begins with building good relationships, says director of income generation **Kevin Yardley**

Identify your key partners

Start by listening to what your PTA or Friends' group has to say. These people are motivated parents who have experience of school fundraising and, therefore, the kind of local connections and insight from which you can build.

Develop your local awareness and networks by dropping in on meetings taking place across your community, whether that be sports partnerships, council forums, arts and drama groups or creative people's networks. Ask people running community groups what they need and what they like that already exists. This will help you identify local shortfalls or excess facilities, as well as who needs space and what kind of facilities work best.

Face to face contact is incredibly important as you can make multiple connections and demonstrate your interest and enthusiasm in what is happening. We've had to make do on Zoom to some extent, but it's not the same. I often go to Starbucks with my school logo visible, as people always come over and chat and this inevitably leads to new business.

Most local authorities run a range of forums, which may include a guest speaker and therefore function as a learning element allowing you to top up on CPD. Such forums often have breakout sessions, which are a chance to network and promote the school. For instance, I attended a Hertfordshire partnership event on the topic of support for social change. It included seminars with

local police officers and premier football clubs that looked at the impact of providing opportunities for young offenders. It was a chance to meet some amazing people and develop my contacts.

Lots of schools continue with the same hirers but when I started I wanted to make sure that we had the right fit for the school. I worked on developing my understanding of sports and other provisions across our area for six months before we fully launched our lettings business. By then, I knew exactly what was going on and what was needed, and I had built a broad range of relationships.

Why are strong relationships important?

As part of your strategic plan, you need to align the facilities you have with any national and local undersupply, so that you can be confident about the opportunities for further development. At The Generations MAT, we developed a new 3G pitch because we knew it would generate income, due to the national shortage and local undersupply of floodlit training areas.



Always do business with organisations whose values align with yours in order to avoid tensions and conflicts of interest. My Trust's view is that we are creating income that will be invested in our students' education and we want to support our wider community. So whether we are offering facilities that encourage young people to become more active or hosting the local Greek school as it prepares some of our own students for an extra GCSE in Greek, it's a win/win.

If you're looking for funding streams to help you develop facilities, then face-to-face contact is more important than ever, particularly for sports. Getting to know the funders and the individuals on their panels will enable you to understand their concepts and also demonstrate that you are working towards similar goals (such as combatting rising youth crime).

How to build relationships

The most important thing is to listen so that you can tailor your pitch to meet the community need. LinkedIn is useful for developing connections. For instance, I linked up with our local creative people's franchise for the performing arts, which then led me to linking in with another operatic society that needed space.

We always bring potential hirers in to view the site. It's difficult for

'To be successful in income generation, you have to have support from the top. Our school leaders constantly refer to what we do and why'

both sides to explore potential opportunities by simply looking at photos on a website. But if you're in the space, then you end up talking through all kinds of ideas of how it could work. We offer classrooms with multi-purpose flooring which can be adjusted for different activities, as well as mobile ballet bars and other equipment. We also schedule a taster session so that people can bring in a new class and see if they like it.

We like to be flexible so that things can grow and develop organically. We have a dance teacher who started with two sessions a week and has grown her business with us to 16 hours a week. Now she runs large junior classes of 30 or so kids (many of whom are our students) in our hall and smaller classes in the dance studios. Once a month I greet every hirer to see how they're settling in. We've also just launched a customer satisfaction survey to get regular feedback.

To be successful in income generation, you have to have support from the top. Our school leaders constantly refer to what we do and why, and our team attends morning briefings. We've built

relationships with teachers by demonstrating how they will benefit from the income ploughed back into the school. Teachers use the same booking system as hirers and they do have to make some compromises, such as putting equipment away at the end of the school day. However, they've been happy to gain more free periods for planning, and be supported by a strengthened SEN team. Plus, seeing the new build sixth form block get under way has really brought people on board.

The lettings business now brings in £500,000 a year, with 65% of the profit going to school (compared to around 50% with an external lettings company). I have two office staff – one of whom has children and prefers to work evenings, which benefits our many customers with day jobs. We've also trained a team of sixth formers to work as casuals. We pay them well and they do a responsible job, preparing rooms and equipment or locking up at the end of an evening session.

We try to make ourselves part of school life and don't draw a distinction between the school and lettings. My staff came in on a Sunday to set up the vaccine centre for the school, and I mentor students and run after school swimming sessions.

Kevin Yardley is director of income generation at The Generations Multi Academy Trust, Hertfordshire