

# Karthik's Guide to Getting Sponsors (That Actually Works)

Hey! I'm Karthik, a student from Singapore who somehow figured out how to get companies to give me money for hackathons. I've gotten 10k+ in sponsorships from places like DBS, TikTok, Google, and even government agencies.

I was also part of the Counterspell HQ team worldwide, which was pretty cool. But I started with literally nothing and got rejected by like 40 companies before I figured this out.

**Quick note:** This is specifically for you Hack Clubbers! You have advantages you probably don't even realize.

## Resources that helped me:

- [hack.af/meginar](https://hack.af/meginar) - Watch this! Seriously good Hack Clubbers talking about fundraising
- [hack.af/karthik-cal](https://hack.af/karthik-cal) - Book time with me if you want me to review your emails (but message me on Slack first pleaseee!)

## My Story (Because Context Matters)

I started organizing events in 2021 with Progressio. Had no idea what I was doing. Reached out to 50-60 companies and got... nothing. Radio silence.

My first sponsorship email was embarrassingly bad:

"We are requesting you to sponsor us, in in-kind or even in cash. We will credit you in all media and publicity-related materials..."

**This sucked.** No wonder nobody responded.

But then I got my first sponsor - Cialfo, an edtech company my school actually used. That's when I realized: connections and research matter way more than perfect emails.

Fast forward to now: DBS Group gave us 8k+, TikTok and Google sponsored Counterspell, and I've helped tons of other Hack Clubbers get sponsors too.

The secret? There actually IS a formula, and I'm gonna share it.

## Step 1: Finding Companies (The Smart Way)

### The Search Trick That Works

Search exactly this: event "sponsorship" [your country]

Put quotes around sponsorship - this finds actual sponsorship portals, not random stuff. I do event "sponsorship" singapore and find hundreds of companies.

But here's the thing: **don't just mass apply.** That's what I did wrong initially.

## Who to Actually Target

1. **Companies you have connections to** - Start here! My school used Cialfo, so I emailed them first
2. **Companies that align with your mission** - If your event is about coding education, find edtech companies
3. **Big companies in your area** - Don't be scared! CEOs are people too
4. **Previous sponsors of similar events**

## Your Hack Club Advantage

You're part of Hack Club! Use this. We're a 501(c)(3) with 50,000+ teenagers. That's legit backing. Get on HCB if you haven't already to get this 501(c)(3) status!

## Step 2: Research (This is Where Most People Fail)

Before you email ANYONE, spend 20 minutes researching them. I kid you not, this is why my emails work.

### What to research:

- What does their company actually do?
- What projects are they proud of?
- What's their personal background? (Check LinkedIn)
- How does your event connect to their values?

**Example:** Before emailing DBS, I learned they're Asia's biggest bank but also super focused on digital innovation and youth development. Perfect fit for a coding event.

## Step 3: Make a Prospectus (Don't Skip This!)

This is basically a nice-looking document with all your event details. Companies need this stuff:

- What your event is about
- Who's coming (demographics)
- Sponsorship tiers and what they get
- Past event photos/stats if you have them

**Make it look good!** Use your event colors, nice fonts, etc. No plain Google Docs.

Check out the [Counterspell Boston one](#) for inspiration.

## Step 4: The Email Template That Actually Gets Responses

This is based on my actual email to Google that got a response (they actually replied and we got a sponsorship!):

### The Email:

```
Hi [Name],

I hope this email finds you well. My name is [your name], and I am a high school student from [location]. I'm part of Hack Club, the world's largest open-source community of teenagers who like to code and build technical projects. It is a registered 501(c)(3) charity organisation.

[Company name] is incredible. [SPECIFIC RESEARCH - this is crucial! Mention specific products, initiatives, or things you genuinely admire about them. Be detailed and personal.]

The reason I'm emailing you is that I'm organising [event name], a [duration] hackathon for [number] teenagers across [location] happening on [dates]. I wanted to reach out to you to see if [company] would be interested in [specific ask - venue, sponsorship, etc.] for our event.

I believe that coding is the closest we've gotten to a superpower - it changed the trajectory of my life, and I want to bring that experience to more students!

I'd love to send you more information or schedule a call if you're interested. Let me know what you need or what time you want to talk, and I'll make it happen! :-)
```

I look forward to talking to you!

Thanks and warm regards,  
[Your name]

P.S. If you are the wrong person to reach out to, I sincerely apologise and request you please direct me to the appropriate departments. Additionally, if [primary ask] is not possible, I seek your help in putting in a good word for a monetary or in-kind sponsorship as well! I can share a prospectus for this if required.

*Pls don't copy paste the above email and send it to them. I've been gatekeeping this forever :(*

### Why this actually works:

- Professional but still sounds like a teenager
- Extensive specific research shows you actually care about them
- Clear, specific ask (not just "please sponsor us")
- "Superpower" line is personal and memorable
- The P.S. gives them an easy out while keeping the door open
- Follow-up strategy built in

## Step 5: Follow-Up Schedule (Most Important Part)

Here's where everyone messes up. You HAVE to follow up, but don't be annoying about it.

### My exact schedule:

- Send initial email
- **First follow-up:** 5 days later

- **Second follow-up:** 4-5 days after that
- **Final follow-up:** 2-3 weeks later
- **Then stop.** Seriously, stop.

Most of my sponsors actually responded to follow-ups, not the first email.

## Step 6: Practice Makes Perfect (DIY Email Review)

Want me to review your sponsorship email before you send it? Here's how:

1. Write your email to me
2. Research a real company you want to sponsor your event
3. Send your draft email to [karthik@hackclub.com](mailto:karthik@hackclub.com) with:
  - Subject: "Email Review - [Company Name]"
  - Your draft email
  - A few sentences about your research on the company
4. I'll give you specific feedback and help you improve it!

**Important:** Only send me emails you've actually researched and personalized. No copy-paste jobs!

## What NOT to Do (Learn from My Mistakes)

- **Don't email general support addresses** - waste of time
- **Don't send LinkedIn messages** - they're useless, nobody responds
- **Don't be generic** - "we would love your support" means nothing
- **Don't lie about your event size** - they'll find out
- **Don't follow up more than 3 times** - you become spam
- **Don't try to sound older** - being a teenager is your advantage!
- **Don't use boring subject lines** - "sponsorship opportunity" gets deleted immediately. Make it captivating!
- **Don't expect immediate responses** - ghosting is completely normal. Most sponsors ghost, even after calls
- **Don't take ghosting personally** - they love to ghost, it's just how it is

**Important warning:** Don't spam CEOs just because you read this guide. If hundreds of Hack Clubbers start mass-emailing executives, we'll ruin it for everyone. Only email people you've actually researched and think would genuinely care.

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## Getting Guest Speakers (Bonus Round)

Same principles apply but (I think) it's actually easier:

### Who to target:

- Local government officials (they love youth events)
- People at companies you're already talking to
- Alumni from your school who work in tech
- Local startup founders

**Real example:** I got a Senior Parliamentary Secretary to speak at my Model UN event by literally just DMing him on Instagram. Here's the exact message I sent:

```
Hi Mr. [Name]! I hope you're doing well, my name is Karthik Sankar from [School]. We are currently organising a Model United Nations called ... on ... I request that you be the Guest of Honour for GIIS Conference on ... from ... to ... during the opening ceremony at ... We admire your work at ... and ... and hope to bring in a new set of perspectives and public speaking skills to the youth this way. Please do let us know if you will be able to attend this opening ceremony and enlighten the participants. If you have any queries, do revert back to me with them.
```

**He actually responded and came to speak!** Sometimes it really is that simple. Don't overthink it - just be direct, respectful, and show you've done your research.

## After You Get Sponsors

### Immediately after your event:

- Send photos and videos within 48 hours
- Share actual numbers (attendance, projects built, etc.)
- Write a genuine thank you mentioning their specific impact

### Long term:

- Keep them updated on your community
- Invite them to future events
- Remember: these are relationships, not one-time transactions

## Managing Difficult Sponsors

Sometimes sponsors can become demanding or toxic after you've started working with them. Maybe they want too much control over your event, or they start making unreasonable requests.

**Here's the thing: it's okay to say no.** Your event's mission and values come first. I've never had a truly toxic sponsor, but if one starts being problematic, you can always end the relationship. Better to have a smaller budget than compromise what your event stands for. Please trust me on this. I've said no to my school as well if they've become too demanding (ultimately succumbing to my wants hehehehe).

**How to Spot Red Flags:** Honestly? You usually can't spot toxic sponsors until they start being demanding. I've never had a truly toxic sponsor from the start. But here's the thing - if they start making unreasonable requests, demanding too much control over your event content, or being disrespectful to you or your team, it's okay to walk away. Your event's mission comes first. I've even said no to my school when they became too demanding (and ultimately got them to agree to what I wanted anyway hehehehe).

**Remember:** Ghosting after initial interest is normal. Ghosting after agreeing to sponsor and having calls? Also unfortunately normal. Don't let it discourage you.

## Real Talk

Look, this isn't easy. I got rejected by 30 companies before getting my first sponsor. But once you get one good sponsor, it becomes way easier to get others.

Your age is actually an advantage. Adults love supporting passionate teenagers who are building cool stuff. Just be genuine about it.

The companies that sponsor you aren't just giving you money - they're investing in you as a person. Some of my best opportunities came from relationships I built through sponsorships.

**Don't give up after a few rejections.** Every successful Hack Clubber I know has a pile of rejection emails. The difference is they kept going.

### Dealing with the Emotional Side

Look, getting ghosted sucks. You'll email 80+ companies and hear nothing back. You'll have sponsors agree to help and then disappear. You'll get rejections that make you question everything.

This is all normal. Every successful Hack Clubber has been through this. The difference between those who succeed and those who give up? They keep going anyway.

Some sponsors will ghost you even after calls and agreements. It hurts, but it's not about you or your event - it's just how corporate decision-making works sometimes.

**Questions?** Hit me up on Slack first, then we can chat at [hack.af/karthik-cal](https://hack.af/karthik-cal). I review emails all the time for other Hack Clubbers.

**Want more fundraising tips?** Watch [hack.af/meginar](https://hack.af/meginar) - those people are seriously AMAZING at this stuff.

*P.S. - If this guide helps you get sponsors, let me know! I love hearing success stories from other Hack Clubbers. We're all in this together :)*