Event Sponsorship Toolkit

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Key findings

- NANA's own sponsor program runs four tiers — Presenting, Premier, Supporting, and Partner — with benefits and pricing that scale by tier rather than by a fixed menu every sponsor picks from individually.
- A signed sponsorship agreement that specifies fulfillment deadlines in writing, not just benefits, is the single biggest predictor of a sponsor renewing the following year.
- Multi-year sponsors, particularly at the Presenting and Premier tiers, are more likely to renew when NANA's events team confirms next year's placement before the current event ends, rather than waiting until the following planning cycle.
- Sponsorship income that crosses into advertising — where a sponsor's benefit goes beyond acknowledgment into promotional messaging — can trigger unrelated business income tax exposure, a distinction this toolkit's prospectus templates are built to avoid.

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Why NANA built this toolkit

Chief Executive Officer Walter Abernathy oversees NANA's own sponsor relationships across the Summit, the Membership Growth Summit, and NANA's smaller regional and topical events, working with twelve sponsors across four tiers. This toolkit packages the prospectus, contract, and fulfillment templates NANA's own events team uses, adapted for a member association running its own sponsored conference or forum for the first time.

"Associations underprice sponsorship more often than they overprice it," Abernathy said. "The number one mistake I see is a prospectus built around what the event needs to sell, rather than what a sponsor is actually buying — visibility with a specific, defined audience."

NANA's own four-tier structure

NANA's sponsor program runs four tiers, highest to lowest: Presenting, Premier, Supporting, and Partner. Each tier carries a defined set of benefits — booth placement, session sponsorship, logo placement, and attendee-list access where applicable — rather than a menu of add-ons a sponsor assembles individually. NANA's twelve current sponsors span all four tiers, from association-management software and benefits providers at the Presenting level down to payment-processing and audit firms at the Partner level.

A tiered structure, rather than an à la carte one, simplifies both the sales conversation and the fulfillment tracking: an events team selling four defined packages has a much shorter negotiation than one fielding a custom request from every prospective sponsor, and a defined tier structure also makes it easier to compare one sponsor's investment against another's when planning next year's sponsorship goals.

Building a prospectus that sells itself

An effective sponsorship prospectus leads with the audience, not the event: attendee count, job titles, sector breakdown, and how many attendees are decision-makers with purchasing authority at their own organization. A prospectus that opens with the event's history and agenda, saving audience data for a later page, asks a prospective sponsor to read further before finding out whether the event even reaches the people they're trying to reach.

This toolkit's prospectus template puts audience data on the first page, followed by the four-tier benefit structure, and closes with a simple pricing table rather than a lengthy narrative description of each tier's benefits. Abernathy recommends updating the audience data every year rather than reusing a prior year's prospectus with only the dates changed, since a sponsor evaluating a renewal wants to see growth or change in the audience, not a static description that hasn't been updated since the relationship began.

Contracts and fulfillment: what has to be in writing

A signed sponsorship agreement should specify fulfillment deadlines, not only sponsorship benefits: when logo placement goes live, when booth assignments are confirmed, and when any attendee-list data, where offered, is delivered. NANA's events team has found that sponsors who don't renew most often cite a fulfillment gap — a benefit delivered late or not at all — rather than dissatisfaction with the event's audience or format.

Written fulfillment deadlines also protect the events team: a deadline in the contract, rather than an informal understanding, gives staff a clear internal target and gives the sponsor a clear basis for a fulfillment conversation if something slips. NANA's own contract template assigns a single staff owner to each sponsor relationship, responsible for tracking every fulfillment deadline against that specific agreement.

The renewal conversation, timed correctly

NANA's events team has found that confirming next year's sponsorship placement before the current event ends — while a sponsor's team is still on-site and the value of the event is freshest — produces meaningfully higher renewal rates than waiting until the following planning cycle to reach out. This is especially true at the Presenting and Premier tiers, where a sponsor's own

internal budget approval for the following year often needs to start months before the next event.

A short on-site renewal conversation does not need to finalize a contract on the spot; its purpose is to confirm interest and rough terms while the relationship is warm, with the formal agreement following in the weeks after the event. Waiting until the formal planning cycle begins, months later, means competing for a sponsor's attention against other priorities that have accumulated in the interim.

Qualified sponsorship versus advertising

Sponsorship income that stays within "qualified sponsorship" — acknowledgment of the sponsor's name, logo, and general product line, without a call to action, pricing, or comparative claims — is generally not subject to unrelated business income tax. Income that crosses into advertising, where a sponsor's benefit includes promotional messaging beyond acknowledgment, can create UBIT exposure for the hosting association. The Sponsorship Income and UBIT Brief covers this distinction in more depth than this toolkit's contract templates can on their own, and associations building their own sponsorship contracts should review both together.

This toolkit's benefit descriptions and contract language are built to stay within qualified sponsorship wherever the benefit allows, flagging the specific benefit types — anything involving a sponsor-supplied discount code or a direct product endorsement — that risk crossing the line into advertising.

Templates included in this toolkit

This toolkit includes a four-tier prospectus template, a sponsorship agreement template with a fulfillment-deadline schedule, a renewal-outreach email sequence timed to the on-site renewal conversation described above, and a benefit-fulfillment tracking spreadsheet an events team can use across multiple sponsors and events in a single year.

Working with a single sponsor across multiple events

Several of NANA's own sponsors support more than one event across the year — a Presenting-tier sponsor at the Summit may also sponsor the Membership Growth Summit at a different tier, for instance. This toolkit's fulfillment-tracking spreadsheet is built to track a single sponsor's obligations across multiple events in one place, so an events team managing several sponsored events in a year doesn't need to reconcile separate tracking documents to confirm a sponsor's full-year fulfillment status.

Abernathy notes that a sponsor supporting multiple events in a year is also the strongest candidate for a multi-year agreement, since the relationship already spans more of the association's calendar than a single-event sponsorship does, and a multi-year commitment reduces the annual renewal-conversation overhead for both the sponsor and NANA's own events team.

Setting prices for the first time

Associations building a sponsorship program from scratch, without an existing pricing history to anchor a new prospectus against, most often ask how to set an initial price for each tier. This toolkit recommends starting from a comparable event's own published sponsorship pricing where one is available — a similarly sized conference in an adjacent sector, for instance — rather than starting from an internal cost calculation alone, since sponsors evaluate a sponsorship's

price against what similar opportunities cost elsewhere, not against what it costs the hosting association to deliver the benefit.

An association with no comparable pricing to reference should set an initial price conservatively and expect to raise it in future years once the event has a track record, rather than starting high and risking an unsold tier in year one. An unsold Presenting-tier sponsorship in a program's first year is a harder problem to recover from than a modestly underpriced one that sells out and can be repriced upward the following year.

Handling a sponsor that wants a custom benefit

Even inside a tiered structure, a sponsor will occasionally request a benefit outside the standard package — a custom benefit not listed in any tier. NANA's events team evaluates these requests case by case rather than declining them outright, but applies a consistent test: whether the custom benefit can be priced and delivered without disrupting the tiered structure's simplicity for every other sponsor. A request that can be added as a paid add-on to an existing tier is usually workable; a request that would require renegotiating another sponsor's own tier benefits to accommodate it usually is not.

Abernathy recommends documenting any custom benefit granted to one sponsor, and the reasoning behind it, in case a similar request arises from a different sponsor in a future cycle. A precedent set without documentation is difficult for an events team to apply consistently once the staff member who made the original decision has moved on to other responsibilities.

Measuring sponsor return, not just satisfaction

A sponsor's decision to renew ultimately depends on some measure of return on their own investment, not only on how the relationship felt to manage. NANA's events team provides each sponsor with a simple post-event report: booth traffic estimates where applicable, session attendance for any sponsored session, and impressions for any digital placement such as a sponsored newsletter mention. This toolkit includes a template for this report, built to be produced within two weeks of an event's close, while the sponsor's own internal budget conversations for the following year are still active.

A sponsor who receives no data on their own return, beyond a general sense that the event went well, has less to point to internally when advocating for a renewed or expanded sponsorship in their own organization's next budget cycle — an outcome squarely within the hosting association's control to prevent.

When a sponsor relationship ends

Not every sponsor relationship renews indefinitely, and this toolkit includes guidance for the less common but recurring case of a sponsor declining to renew or a hosting association choosing not to invite a sponsor back. A sponsor's own budget priorities can shift for reasons unrelated to the event's performance — a change in the sponsor's own leadership, a shift in marketing strategy, or a reduced marketing budget industry-wide — and an events team should ask directly, at the point of non-renewal, whether the decision reflects something about the event itself or a change on the sponsor's side, since the answer shapes whether that sponsor is worth approaching again in a future year.

Less commonly, an association may choose not to renew a sponsor itself — most often over a fulfillment dispute, a conflict with another sponsor's own category exclusivity, or a shift in the association's own sponsorship strategy toward fewer, larger relationships rather than many smaller ones. NANA's own contract template includes a standard non-renewal clause allowing either party to decline renewal without cause, which this toolkit recommends over a clause

requiring a stated reason, since a required-reason clause tends to produce a strained final conversation rather than a clean, professional close to the relationship.

A final note on multi-year commitments

Multi-year sponsorship agreements reduce annual negotiation overhead for both parties, but this toolkit cautions against locking in multi-year pricing without an adjustment mechanism for inflation or a significant change in the event's own scale. NANA's own multi-year agreements include a modest built-in increase for each renewal year, disclosed to the sponsor at the time the multi-year agreement is signed, rather than negotiated fresh each year — a structure that gives a sponsor predictability while still protecting the hosting association from locking in a rate that falls behind the event's own growing costs over a multi-year term.