

Setting up the BID partnership

Engaging the business community

Once the staff team is in place the first priority for the BID partnership should be to engage with the local business community. One-to-one meetings are without doubt the most effective method of establishing contact with businesses and explaining the potential role of a BID in the area. The number of businesses in a potential BID area (c.200-500 hereditaments (a rateable unit of property) in the Circle BID areas) makes this a possible, albeit demanding, proposition.

Once contact has been made there are a variety of tools that can be used to maintain links with businesses and demonstrate the sort of benefits a BID could bring:

- Events
- Newsletters
- Developing BID champions or ambassadors

Events



It is important to initiate a programme of events, seminars, briefings and networking opportunities to maintain interest and keep up the momentum behind establishing a BID. However, it is also important to maintain a balance and guard against organising so many events that 'BID fatigue' sets in.

Events should normally be organised for a specific reason, not just to discuss the idea of a BID in the area. Ideally this should be something which is of sufficient local interest to encourage people to attend, although general networking events can also be successful. Depending on the nature of the area it may be better to arrange specific events that will be of interest to different sectors of the business community and bear in mind that big businesses tend to want to meet fellow big businesses, not the local sandwich shop proprietor.

When organising an event always allow time for networking at the end, and if possible provide refreshments so businesses can get to know each other thus encourage trading within the BID area. Businesses in the area such as offices, hotels, restaurants and cafes may be prepared to host events and provide refreshments to publicise their facilities.

Different times of the day will be convenient for different types of businesses e.g. hoteliers may find morning meetings (after breakfast has been served) convenient whereas many shopkeepers cannot attend meetings during trading hours. It is also important to bear in mind that many owners of small businesses are not accustomed to attending meetings and may not keep diaries and so will need to be reminded about events on the day.

Despite careful planning, business priorities and staff problems can often mean that attendance at events is low (although providing attractive venues or refreshments can help), and a fall-out rate of at least 20% of those who have accepted an invitation is to be expected for any event. People will also turn up



without sending an RSVP, because they are unaccustomed to this. However, if there are insufficient people at an event there is a danger that it can feel like a failure even if it was actually very targeted with a select guest list.

Always have name badges and a guest list people can take away afterwards. It can be useful to colour code name badges to identify and target businesses that are less well engaged with the BID partnership ([see The Holborn Partnership experience below](#)). If this approach is adopted it is important to ensure that there are sufficient BID partnership staff, Board members and well engaged businesses attending an event to talk to all the less well known guests.

Newsletters and correspondence

Newsletters are a very effective mechanism to raise the profile of the BID partnership and keep a continuous stream of information going out to businesses about the emerging BID's activities and what is going on in the area, which helps to generate a sense of community.

The content of the newsletter must be useful and readable. It is important to monitor who the newsletter is actually read by and to tailor the content according to their interests.

Don't consult or send out important information by newsletter, send this separately, or it may be missed.

Generally, newsletters should be monthly or bimonthly, if they are less frequent than this momentum will be lost and more frequent their value will diminish.

The newsletter can be produced in hard copy and mailed out or hand delivered (giving another opportunity to speak to businesses) or they can be sent out by email if businesses in the area are used to receiving communication this way. Regardless of how the newsletter is sent out there must be a simple system to allow recipients to de-list themselves.

If the newsletter is sent out by email it is important that the BID develops a real, as well as a virtual, presence. To establish credibility signed correspondence on company letterhead must also be sent out by post so that local businesses have something on file from the BID partnership.

Developing BID champions or ambassadors

When making initial one-to-one contact with businesses it is important to identify those individuals with the interest and commitment to devote time to developing the BID. These individuals should be encouraged to get involved, possibly by becoming Board members, and to become ambassadors or champions for the BID going out and explaining the idea to other businesses.

Local business champions can be particularly effective in communicating the BID message because they are trusted and respected friends rather than outsiders. A BID champion can recommend the idea of a BID and



open doors and facilitate introductions so that BID partnership staff can explain the whole concept in more detail. BID champions must be carefully briefed to ensure they can:

- answer the most common questions about what a BID could deliver in the area;
- handle obvious objections;
- indicate the likely costs and benefits a BID would bring;
- pass more detailed enquiries on to the right BID staff member.

Evidence from The Circle Initiative

Networking and events

Better Bankside found that specific themed events rather than those about the BID were better attended. Events about proposed development in the area were particularly well attended.



Heart of London held monthly 'Breakfast Banter' meetings for local businesses. The venue for these meetings moved around the area and they were promoted as an opportunity for business-to-business contact as well as to provide an update on BID work. Although these were not particularly well attended they provided a valuable opportunity for the BID team to have one-to-one conversations with businesses.

The Holborn Partnership developed a colour coding system for name badges at events which divided participants into:

- Partnership staff, Board members
- Businesses with which the BID partnership had not had enough contact with, further divided into those who were:
 - one colour for those brought in but not involved
 - another colour for those who they needed to get by in from

Partnership staff, Board members and highly engaged businesses were briefed on the label coding system and asked to try to speak to businesses that the partnership had not managed to engage with and report back on any conversations they had.

Paddington BID operated the Paddington Business Circle which ran a series of monthly events with



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external speakers to generate discussion around the issues for the Paddington area, promote the local supply of goods and services, provide networking opportunities for businesses to meet each other and the larger, new commercial occupiers at Paddington Waterside. In some cases the events were held jointly with other organisations like Business Link for London. Examples of topics covered include:

- Tendering for public service contracts
- Marketing Paddington
- Retail Vision
- Redevelopment of St Mary's Hospital
- Meet the Buyer - an introduction to Buyers for the major occupiers of the new Paddington Waterside development

Waterloo Quarter found that the purpose of an event was often secondary and that socialising and networking were far more important in an area dominated by small businesses.

Newsletters

Better Bankside sent out a monthly [e-brief](#) and had a software package called Swift Page, that provides information on who opens an email and which parts they read and the extent to which it was passed on. This showed that beyond the initial mailing, penetration within companies was not very high.

Heart of London produced a monthly [e-bulletin](#) and a hard copy version was sent to businesses without internet access. They also sent out e-postcards on specific subjects.

The Holborn Partnership sent out [e-mail newsletters](#) that also featured business-to-business promotions.

Paddington BID produced an [email and hard copy newsletter](#). This was not a glossy publication but produced on A4 paper providing a useful source of information including details of new businesses opening in the area. The newsletters were also used to offer projects such as shopfront assistance and anti-graffiti treatment to businesses.

Waterloo Quarter produced a monthly [VOICE](#) newsletter that was designed in house and printed by a company in the BID area. It had an informal chatty style and included a column dealing with business' problems.

BID Champions

- Champions dinner The Circle Central team organised a Champions dinner to bring together key individuals from the five BID areas to discuss what they wanted from a BID and how they as individuals could promote the idea. Guests were seated at tables of 6-8 each hosted by a BID partnership Chair who guided the discussion with a series of questions for debate. Each table also had a note taker and each table's conclusions were fed back to the whole group



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- **Sector suppers** - Paddington BID organised a series of suppers to bring together the hotel, restaurant and pub, retail, office and property owner sectors and convert them into champions for the BID



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