

PATRAS-MED · IGEM 2026

The Guide of a Successful Fundraiser

How to Survive iGEM

Nobody tells you this when you join a synthetic biology competition, but a surprising amount of your year will be spent writing emails to strangers and refreshing your inbox. Here is everything we learned, so you can skip the part where we learned it the hard way.

Written by the Patras-Med iGEM 2026 team, University of Patras and free for any team to reuse.

SECTION ONE

Choosing who to approach

or: stop emailing everyone

The instinct of every new fundraising team is to build a list of 300 companies and start at the top. Resist it. A list of 40 well-chosen targets will outperform 300 random ones, and you will still be sane in March.

- **Start with proximity.** Your university, your department, your supervisors' collaborators, the lab next door that owes someone a favour. Local companies that already know your institution are far more likely to answer than a multinational that has never heard of your city.
- **Then look for overlap.** Ask yourself honestly: what does this company get out of us? If the answer is “nothing, but they have money”, move on. The good targets are the ones where your project touches their world. If you work with yeast, think fermentation, food, brewing, biotech reagents. If you build a diagnostic, think clinical labs and medical suppliers.
- **Follow the people who already said yes.** Previous iGEM teams' sponsor lists are public and sitting on their wikis. A company that sponsored a team three years ago has already decided that this kind of thing is worth doing. You are not cold-calling them, you are reminding them.
- **Split your list into three tiers.** Reagent and consumable companies are often happier to give you products than cash, and products are just as valuable when they are things you were going to buy anyway. Local businesses give smaller amounts but say yes faster. Large corporations take months and have actual budgets, so start those conversations early and expect silence for a while.

> **ONE MORE THING**
>
> Check whether the company has a CSR page, a sponsorship form, or a dedicated contact. If they do, use it. Going around an official process to email someone's personal address rarely ends well.

SECTION TWO

What goes in the email

eleven seconds, two hundred unread messages

Your email is going to be read in about eleven seconds by someone who has 200 unread messages. Write accordingly.

- **The subject line decides everything.** It should say who you are and what you want, with no mystery. “Sponsorship request - iGEM Patras-Med student team, University of Patras” works. “An exciting opportunity!” goes straight to the bin, and deservedly so.
- **Open with who you are, in one sentence.** You are a student team from a named university, competing in an international synthetic biology competition. That is it. Do not open with a paragraph about the history of synthetic biology.
- **Explain the project in plain language.** Two or three sentences, no jargon, no promoter names. If your grandmother would not understand it, rewrite it. The reader does not need to understand your circuit, they need to understand why it matters.
- **Say exactly what you are asking for.** This is where most emails fail. “Any support would be appreciated” puts the work of deciding onto a busy stranger, and busy strangers resolve that by not replying. Instead: a specific amount, a specific list of consumables, a specific piece of equipment to borrow. Give them something they can say yes to.
- **Say what they get back.** Logo on the wiki, logo on the poster and team t-shirts, visibility at the Jamboree in front of thousands of people from the field, mentions on social media, a presence in front of a few hundred students who will graduate into their industry. If you have sponsorship tiers, attach them. If you do not have tiers, make tiers.
- **Attach one document, not six.** A clean two-to-four page PDF with the project, the team, the budget and the tiers. One attachment gets opened; five attachments get postponed forever.
- **Close with a concrete next step.** Offer a fifteen-minute call or a short meeting, and say when you are available. An open-ended ending invites an open-ended non-answer.

> **KEEP IT UNDER 250 WORDS**
>
> Everything else belongs in the attachment.

SECTION THREE

What makes a good fundraiser

some of this is skill and some of it is temperament

- **A thick skin, or at least a convincing imitation.** You will be ignored far more often than you are rejected, and ignored stings in a stupid, lingering way. It is not personal. Budgets were already allocated, the right person was on leave, the email arrived on a bad Tuesday. The only correct response is to send the next one.
- **Organisation that survives month four.** A spreadsheet with every company, contact, date sent, date followed up, and outcome. Not because it is fun, but because in February you will genuinely not remember whether you emailed that company in October, and emailing them twice looks worse than not emailing at all.
- **Patience with timelines you do not control.** A yes can take three months to become an invoice. Corporate procurement moves at its own speed and nothing you do will accelerate it. Start early enough that the delay does not matter.
- **Honesty about what you are.** You are a student team. You do not have a marketing department, you cannot guarantee reach figures, and pretending otherwise is transparent. Your actual advantage is enthusiasm and a genuine story, and companies sponsor students precisely because they are students. Lean into it.
- **The ability to write like a human.** Every sponsor has read a thousand emails that sound like they were generated by a committee. Sounding like an actual person who cares about an actual project is a competitive advantage, and it is free.
- **Knowing when to stop.** Two follow-ups and then let it go. There is a line between persistent and a nuisance, and crossing it costs you a contact you might have wanted next year.

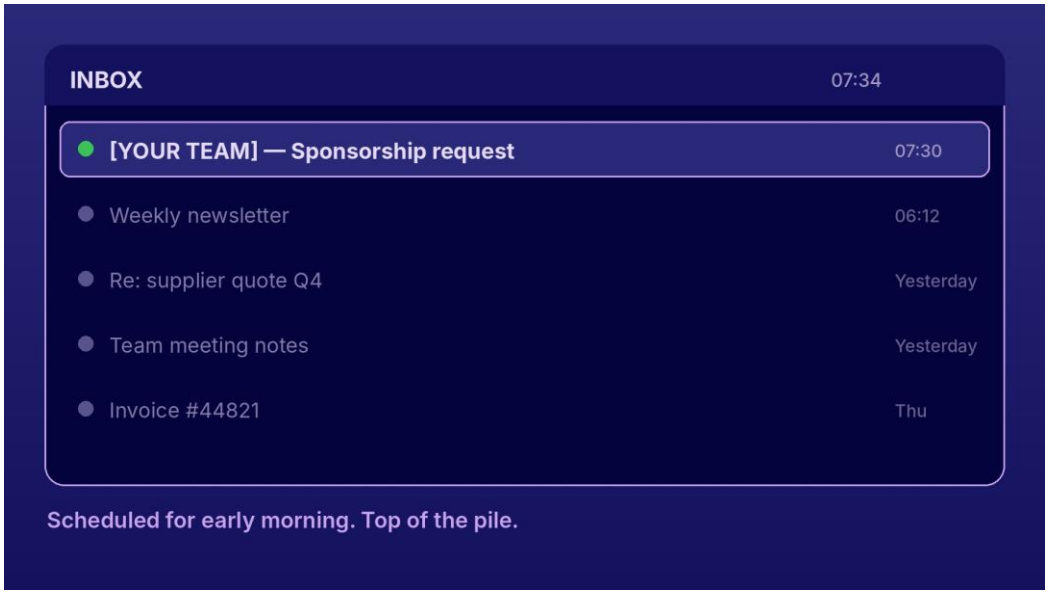
SECTION FOUR

Tips & tricks for a successful sponsorship

the small things that quietly decide everything

THE SINGLE BEST TRICK IN THIS GUIDE

Schedule your emails for early morning. Write them whenever you like midnight, during a lecture, while waiting for a gel to run but schedule them to arrive between 7:00 and 8:30 AM on a weekday. Your email will be sitting at the top of the inbox when your recipient opens it with their first coffee, instead of buried under forty newer messages by the time they look. Every mail client has a send-later button. Use it religiously.



07:30. The difference between being read and being scrolled past.

- **Tuesday to Thursday.** Monday mornings are triage and Friday afternoons are already the weekend. The middle of the week is where decisions get made.
- **Follow up twice, then stop.** First follow-up after one week, second after two or three more. Keep it short and friendly, reply in the same thread so they have the context, and never open with “as per my previous email” unless you want to sound like a lawyer.
- **Find a name.** An email to info@ is a message in a bottle. An email to an actual human being with an actual job title is a conversation. LinkedIn exists, company pages exist, and a polite call to reception asking who handles sponsorships works better than you expect.
- **Ask for things, not only money.** Reagents, plasticware, enzymes, sequencing runs, printing, catering for your outreach event, a venue, a shipping account. In-kind sponsorship is easier to approve internally, because it comes out of a different budget and often out of stock that already exists.
- **Make saying yes trivially easy.** Attach the invoice details, the logo specifications, the deadline, and the bank information before they ask. Every question you force them to ask is another week.

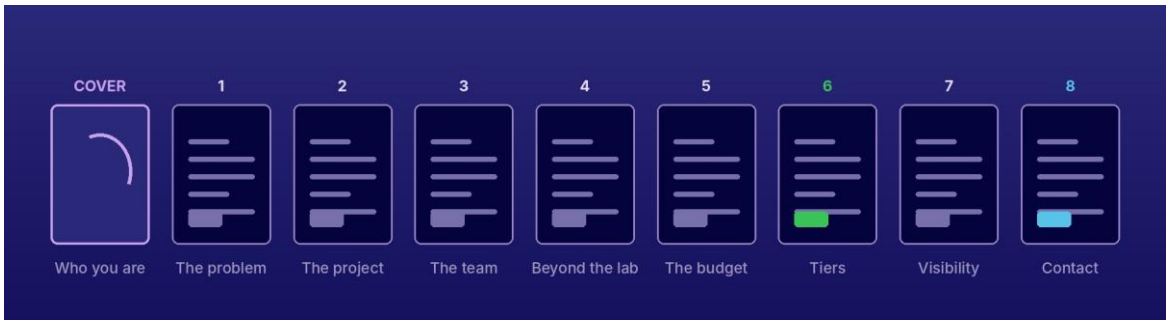
- **Say thank you properly, and then again later.** Thank them when they commit. Then send them a photo of the team at the Jamboree, a link to the finished wiki, a note about how the project went. Sponsors who feel like part of something come back next year. This is how a team builds a sponsor list that outlives its members.
- **Keep a running document for the next team.** Who answered, who did not, who was lovely, which contact changed jobs, what worked. Your successors will be writing their first email in roughly eight months, and the kindest thing you can do for them is make sure they are not starting from zero.
- **Celebrate the small ones.** The first yes is going to be a company giving you a box of pipette tips, and you should be as delighted about it as if it were ten thousand euros. Momentum matters, and so does morale.

SECTION FIVE

The booklet: what actually goes inside

the only thing a sponsor will ever read carefully about you

At some point a company will reply with “send us more information”, and what you send next decides everything. That document is your booklet. It should be short enough to finish in five minutes and good enough to forward to a colleague.



Eight pages, one job each.

- **A cover that says who you are.** Team name, university, the competition and the year, your logo. If someone opens this file six weeks later with no memory of your email, the cover alone should orient them.
- **One page on the problem.** Not the science but the problem. Why does this matter to someone who does not work in a lab? A sponsor who understands the problem will forgive not understanding the solution.
- **One page on the project.** Here you may be slightly more technical, but keep it visual. A diagram does more work than three paragraphs. Name the organism, name the goal, say what the thing does. Leave the promoter architecture for the wiki.
- **The team.** A group photo and a few lines about who you are, how many of you there are, and what you are studying. This is not filler. Companies sponsor people more often than they sponsor projects, and putting faces on a page makes an abstract student team into a real one.
- **What you do beyond the lab.** Outreach, school visits, public events, collaborations with other teams. For a company's communications or marketing department, this section is frequently the most interesting page in the document, because it is the part that is visible to the public.
- **The budget, honestly presented.** A simple breakdown: consumables, equipment, registration, travel, outreach with a total. You do not need line-item precision, but vague numbers read as if you have not thought it through. Showing that you know where the money goes is itself a form of credibility.
- **The sponsorship tiers.** Named levels, each with an amount and a clear list of what the sponsor receives: logo placement and size on the wiki, the poster, the t-shirts and the presentation; social media mentions; presence at your events. Add a line stating that in-kind contributions of equivalent value are equally welcome, and mean it.

- **Where their logo will actually appear.** A single page with mockups: the wiki footer, the poster, a t-shirt, the Jamboree stand. People decide faster when they can see the thing they are buying.
- **Reach, if you have any numbers.** Jamboree attendance, your social media following, how many students your outreach reached, how many people visit the wiki. Modest real numbers beat impressive invented ones, and nobody expects a student team to have a media kit.
- **Previous sponsors.** If you have any, show their logos. Social proof does a surprising amount of work, and the second yes is always easier to get than the first.
- **Contact details and a deadline.** A named person, an email, a phone number, and the date by which you need an answer for logos to make it onto printed materials. A deadline is not pressure, it is information, and it gives a stalled decision a reason to move.

> **THE PRACTICAL SIDE**
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> Keep it to eight or twelve pages. Export it as a PDF under 5 MB so it survives corporate email filters. Name the file like a professional — PatrasMed_iGEM2026_Sponsorship.pdf, not booklet_final_FINAL_v3.pdf. And have at least one person outside your team read it before it goes anywhere.

SECTION SIX

The things nobody warns you about

learned, in every case, the expensive way

- **The budget is a living document.** Whatever you plan in November will be wrong by March. Something will cost triple, something will arrive broken, and something you forgot entirely will turn out to be mandatory. Build in slack and keep a running total that someone actually updates.
- **Registration and travel will dwarf your lab costs.** It is tempting to fundraise for reagents because that is the exciting part, but the Jamboree is usually the biggest line in the budget. Plan for it from day one.
- **Money has a delivery time.** A commitment in January is not cash in January. Ask about the payment timeline when they say yes, not when you need the money.
- **Keep the paperwork.** Invoices, receipts, agreements, logo permissions, and every email where someone said yes. Universities have finance departments and finance departments have rules, and “it was agreed over the phone” is not a document.
- **Divide the work.** Fundraising cannot be one person's burden for a year. Split the list, share the templates, rotate the follow-ups. The person doing all the emailing alone in February is the person who burns out in March.
- **It is genuinely a skill.** Writing a clear ask, handling rejection, following up without being irritating, keeping a pipeline alive for months. You will use all of it for the rest of your professional life, long after you have forgotten what your promoter was called.

SECTION SEVEN

A template you can steal

copy it, rename it, rewrite it — that is what it is for

Everything below is meant to be reused by any team. Replace anything in square brackets and delete the rest.

7.1 The first email

Subject: Sponsorship request — **[Team Name]**, **[University]**, iGEM **[Year]**

Dear **[Name]**,

I am writing on behalf of **[Team Name]**, a team of **[number]** students from **[University]** competing in iGEM **[Year]**, the international synthetic biology competition held each year in **[city]**.

Our project, **[Project Name]**, aims to **[one sentence, no jargon, what it does and why it matters]**. We are developing it over the course of this year in the laboratory of **[department or supervisor]**, alongside an outreach programme that has so far reached **[number]** students and members of the public.

We are looking for support to cover **[specific need: consumables / registration fees / travel to the Jamboree]**, and I wanted to ask whether **[Company]** would consider **[a specific ask: a contribution of €X / a donation of Y reagents / sponsoring our outreach programme]**.

In return, **[Company]**'s logo would appear on our project wiki, our poster and presentation at the Jamboree in front of **[number]** attendees from academia and industry, our team t-shirts, and our social media channels. I have attached a short booklet with the full details, our budget and our sponsorship tiers.

It would be an honor for us to arrange a short call over the next two weeks so we can provide you with more information regarding our team.

Thank you for your time.

Kind regards,

[Full Name]
[Role], **[Team Name]** — **[University]**
[email] · **[phone]** · **[LinkedIn]**

7.2 The follow-up

Subject: Re: Sponsorship request — **[Team Name]**, **[University]**, iGEM **[Year]**

Dear **[Name]**,

I hope this finds you well. I wanted to follow up briefly on my message from **[date]**, in case it arrived at a busy time.

We would still be delighted to have **[Company]** involved this year, and I am happy to adjust the proposal to whatever format works best on your side: financial support, laboratory materials, or support for a specific event.

If sponsorship is not possible this year, I would be grateful to know, so that I can stop filling your inbox. Either way, thank you for your time.

Kind regards,

[Full Name]

Send the first follow-up one week later, the second two to three weeks after that, both in the same thread, both scheduled for early morning. Then stop.

7.3 The booklet skeleton

PAGE	CONTENT
Cover	Team name, university, competition, year, logo, one-line project tagline
1	The problem, in plain language
2	The project: what it does, with a diagram
3	The team: group photo, who you are, what you study
4	Beyond the lab: outreach, collaborations, public engagement
5	The budget: categories and total
6	Sponsorship tiers: names, amounts, benefits per tier
7	Visibility: mockups of logo placement
8	Previous sponsors, reach figures, contact details with a deadline

7.4 The tracking sheet

COLUMN	WHY IT EXISTS
Company	—
Contact name & role	Saves you from info@ next time
Email	—
Category	Reagents / local / corporate / foundation
Date sent	—
Follow-up 1	Date

COLUMN	WHY IT EXISTS
Follow-up 2	Date
Status	No reply / interested / yes / no
Amount or items	What was actually agreed
Notes	Who was helpful, when to try again, what to say next year

7.5 The timeline



WHEN	WHAT
Month 1	Build the target list, write the booklet, agree the budget
Month 2	First wave of emails to corporate sponsors as they take longest
Month 3	Follow-ups; approach local businesses and reagent suppliers
Month 4	Confirm commitments, send invoicing details, collect logos
Month 5 onwards	Keep sponsors updated, chase outstanding payments
After the Jamboree	Thank-you messages with photos and results; hand the tracking sheet to next year's team

Now go schedule those emails for 7:30 AM.

Best regards,

Fundraising Team of Patras Med 2026