Building Successful Partnerships

Successful collaborations require strategic networking among potential stakeholders. In order to network effectively, organizations need to set goals and figure out the best way to accomplish these. This process includes doing an honest evaluation of your organization's processes and reflecting on the historical and cultural context of your organization.

Networking Basics:

- Always carry your business card. If you don't have one, it is imperative that you have cards made. This can be done simply and inexpensively on your computer, if lack of funds is an issue.
- Have a pre-planned and thoughtful response to the most common questions: "What do you do?" and "Where do you work?" Answer with purpose.
- Join associations, civic and business groups and attend their meetings whenever possible.
- Ask questions that uncover the needs of a potential partner or stakeholder and that might help to identify some common ground.
- Listen attentively.
- Always ask for a business card when dealing with a potential partner or stakeholder.
- Create a database or file system of names and business cards, which you refer to frequently.
- Make at least one new contact a week (if this seems impractical, then make at least one new contact a month).

Places to Network:

- Civic groups: Kiwanis, Lions Club, Rotary, Garden Clubs
- Associations and Business Groups: Chamber of Commerce, Small Business Associations, Human Resources groups, Professional organizations, network marketing groups
- Neighborhood Associations
- Press Conferences
- Ribbon-cuttings
- New Business Open House
- Libraries
- Network outside your "comfort zone." Our comfort zone may make it hard to make connections outside our particular industries, immediate business or service or outside our own cultural group. Think about what you may be missing by not networking with businesses and organizations that are outside your comfort zone.

Identify the potential for collaboration by asking the following questions:

- What is your mission?
- If you could change something about your service/business/agency what would that be?
- Are there any areas where you need help?
- What are your needs?
- What kind of assets could you bring to the collaborative table?
- What are your strengths and weaknesses?
- How do you think the community perceives your business/service/agency?
- How would you improve your relationship/image with the community?
- If I could show you a way to address these needs, would you be interested?

Partnerships with Business and Government

"Too often, nonprofit social service organizations limit the role of government and business to that of donor or major funder. However, communities would be better served if the social service, government and business sectors each contributed what they know best. The social service sector enables individuals to cultivate skills and abilities that foster independence. The government sector is capable of coordinating activities and supplying resources. Finally, the business sector is adept at meeting deadlines, honoring contracts and producing tangible results." – From *Transforming Charity* by Ryan Streeter

Ask yourself these questions:

- In what ways could your collaboration benefit by inviting representatives of the business or government sector to join in?
- What is the overlap between your mission and the interests of businesses or government in your community?
- How can you demonstrate your organization's effectiveness in meeting its mission?
- What non-material resources (e.g., training, strategic planning, budget/management skills) does your collaboration need in order to fulfill its mission?
- What businesses in your community might provide these resources?

This worksheet is adapted from materials developed by Campaign Consultation, Inc., for the ASK to Sustain Institute in San Diego, California, October 2003. Campaign Consultation, Inc. works with individuals and organizations at local, state, national and international levels to achieve community development, fund raising, diversity utilization, issue advocacy, media and marketing, public policy as well as organizational and business development success.
Website: http://www.campaignconsultation.com/index.html

Building Effective Partnerships With Schools
Source: Points of Light Foundation, 2002

Collaboration, Coordination or Networking?

True collaboration is a long-term process, often going through many revisions as environment and relationships change.

Networking is simply sharing information for the benefit of both parties.

Coordination includes a willingness to alter activities to achieve a common purpose.

Cooperation is a slightly more ambitious form of partnership that builds on coordination by sharing resources.

Full **collaboration**, includes not only the exchange of information, altering activities and sharing resources, but also enhancing the capacity of other partners for mutual benefit and to achieve a common purpose. Since full collaboration is the most complex form of partnership, it may not be the best way to start partnerships among organizations that are unfamiliar with each other. For example, a school that has never worked with a community based organization may want to start a partnership by networking or coordination, which are simpler forms of partnership.

Remember, success is the best way to encourage continued partnership, so be sure to set goals that are concrete and obtainable, especially at the early stages of a partnership.

Techniques to guide those who are working towards collaborations for service-learning:

- Make sure everyone shares a commitment to a common vision, since some problems will surely arise.
- Put agendas and needs (personal and organizational) out in the open, agendas or needs do not need to be identical, but should be compatible.
- Be sensitive to the needs, styles and limitations of other collaborators.
- Involve more people at all levels; by involving more people at your organization and those with whom you collaborate you will improve the sustainability of the collaboration.
- Maintain frequent and open communication.
- Be sure everyone understands expectations especially concerning tasks and accountability.

Benefits of Service-Learning Partnerships

- Accomplish work together that would be difficult or impossible to accomplish alone.
- Build a shared sense of commitment and responsibility throughout the community.
- Ensure that everyone who is touched by the service is represented in the leadership, planning and implementation.
- Avoid unnecessary duplication of efforts among agencies.
- Offer opportunities for people to learn from each other and share resources.
- Contribute to rebuilding healthy, caring communities.

Establishing Effective Relationships

1. Know your objectives. Before contact, build a solid base.
2. Be able to articulate your goals, your service objectives and your learning expectations.
3. Know your volunteers. What types, their range of interests, their limitations, their talents.
4. Know your resources. Can you provide PR, transportation, duplication? Remember, simple details loom large to agencies.
5. Know agencies and their programs. Understand their structure, their mission, and their activities at least well enough to ask informed questions.
6. Make a strong effort to involve others in approaching agencies and to use them in an on-going way for program implementation.

Discussion Starter Questions

The following questions can help you start conversations about partnering with schools, agencies or campus. Remember it will also be important that you provide answers to these questions to potential partners.

- What experience have you had in community service or volunteering? What impact has that had on you?
- What experiences has your agency had working with students?
- What experience have you had working with students?
- Why are you interested in this partnership?
- What do you think is the most important reason for involving students in service-learning?
- What is one thing you hope students would learn about the community or society?
- What are the major challenges to providing services to community?

Steps to Successful Partnerships

1. Identify Potential Partners

- Schools
- Youth Service Organizations
- Nonprofit Organizations
- Businesses
- Recipients of Services
- Individuals

2. Identify Needs That Are of Mutual Concern

- Do a needs assessment of the community with students and agency representatives.

Determine Individuals Who Will Serve as Primary Liaisons in the Planning and Implementation Process

- Assign student coordinators
- Visit agencies ahead of time

3. Set up a Local Advisory Board

Negotiate and Agree Upon Desired Outcomes for:

- Recipient of Volunteer Services
- Student/Youth Volunteer
- Nonprofit Organizations
- Educational Institution
- Others

4. Negotiate and Agree Upon Expectations for:

- Recipient of Volunteer Services
- Student/Youth Volunteer
- Nonprofit Organizations
- Educational Institution
- Others

5. Determine Best Method for On-Going Community and Evaluation
6. Periodically, Redesign Relationships Based on Changing Needs and Circumstances

See the National Service-Learning Clearinghouse online at
http://www.servicelearning.org/ for more information and resources.

Faith-Based Partnerships

The following information uses examples from faith-based and housing/commercial development partnerships. However, many of the tenets of the partnership are applicable to any organization or institution when partnering with the faith-based sector.

In 1989, with the help of the Lily Endowment, the project called "Religious Institutions as Partners in Community-Based Development" was launched, and twenty-eight projects, each usually involving multiple religious institutions with community development organizations, were supported. Concurrently, an evaluation was commissioned to Rainbow Research, Inc. of Minneapolis. The mission of Rainbow Research, Inc. is to promote the increased effectiveness of "socially concerned organizations" in the performance of their missions, through activities designed to promote and strengthen program impact, service quality and organizational capacity. This worksheet was developed from the report, *Better Together: Religious Institutions as Partners in Community-Based Development*," by David M. Scheie.

Partnership Development

The following characteristics are evident in productive and sustainable partnerships between religious organizations and community development organizations:

- Partners have a clear, common vision of the partnership and the development of goals that is firmly rooted in shared values.

- An empowering and mutually supportive relationship, based on a high level of trust and respect between the partners, exist.

- Each partner recognizes and appreciates the strengths of the others, and they effectively divide tasks between them.

- The partnership structure promotes inclusiveness and bridges ecumenical, racial, cultural, geographic or economic differences.

- Volunteers can serve the project in multiple ways, and committee structures encourage participation and are fair and productive.

Key contributions by religious institutions include leadership, vision and energy, including volunteer contributions in many roles and skill levels; credibility, community support and access to direct beneficiaries; and political clout. Less commonly, religious institutions provide money, property, and human development skills and values.

To identify religious institutions likely to be effective partners in housing or commercial development projects, community based development organizations should look for these characteristics:

- The religious institution is physically near the property being redeveloped. It directly suffers from and directly benefits from site improvement; members can see the changes as they drive to the religious institution's building.

- The clergy provides personal leadership: s/he's committed to the project and knowledgeable about it.

- The membership respects and trusts the clergy enough that they'll follow the clergy's lead through the commitments, risks, and hassles of development and partnership. Usually this means the clergy has been with the religious institution for several years.

- Lay leaders are committed and involved, and the clergy will delegate responsibility to others. This is important both for the capacity that extra people bring, and because the project may stall if clergy (who have so many demands on their time) insist on personal involvement in daily details. In addition, clergy don't stay forever at one religious institution; lay leadership is important to carry on when the clergy leave.

- The religious institution has successful financial and construction experience. This can include paying off its own mortgage and completing church building projects. This gives it confidence and technical skills for this kind of activity, and gives confidence to other project backers.

- The religious institution has skills at, and a reputation for, community consensus building. This is important for forging consensus on the project's direction, and to reassure politically sensitive funders and other resource contributors. Ideally, the institution has a prior commitment to and experience with community-based development and community partnerships.

- The religious institution has, and commits to the revitalization project, financial, real estate and technical resources. Religious institutions may have more available money if they belong to a denomination that has committed substantial financial and other resources to social and economic justice. Religious institutions can sometimes reach into those extra pockets for support. However, there are many valuable contributors from other denominations as well.

- The religious institution has political clout: a large number of members, politically influential members, and the willingness to use its influence.

- The religious institution practices a theology of social justice as well as charity.

To attract and retain religious institutional partners, community development organizations should offer projects and partnerships that:

- Provide a variety of volunteer service opportunities that allow religious institutions to participate at different levels and in different ways.

- Undertake neighborhood physical development, ideally in close proximity to the religious institution itself. This is partly because the improvements are so visible and partly because construction and renovation projects offer opportunities for people to give their labor and construction skills, allowing many more people to be involved.

- Emphasize human development as well as physical and capital development. Because they want to minister to people, religious institutions are delighted to know how projects benefit people's lives. For example, find or create ways members can relate personally to direct beneficiaries (through mother-to-mother or family-to-family linkages, joint volunteering on construction projects, and other human development programs). Religious institutions also like to know that good work is being done in their name.

- Provide opportunities to get to know other religious institutions and community members; ecumenical, interfaith and interracial projects can be particularly satisfying.

- Provide religious institutions with a capable development partner – one who will take primary responsibility for the details.

- Provide opportunities to build their development expertise – eventually reducing dependence on the development partner(s).

- Treat religious institutions as equals, respecting and drawing on their unique resources – their moral vision, their spiritual depth, their membership – even while helping them build their technical development skills.

Additional Resources:
Faith-Based Community Initiatives (FBCI) formerly FACES, an initiative funded by the Corporation for National and Community Service, is designed to enhance efforts to increase community organizations' (secular and faith-based) participation in National Service programs. FBCI will identify barriers that prevent access to these programs, as well as provide tools to improve the chances for admission into these programs. FBCI will also provide training and technical assistance to enhance the Corporation's ability to work with community organizations.
Website: http://www.ncpc.org/ncpc/ncpc/?pg=5882-2282-14104-13096