

Strategic Collaborations

Partnerships are necessary to fulfill the organization's goals. Organizations usually do not have all the staff and financial resources they need to plan and complete a successful, sustainable project on their own.

A successful organization is a respected and active participant and leader in the community, and maintains strong connections with its constituents. It participates in strategic alliances and partnerships that significantly advance their goals and expand their influence.

Process Worksheet 2.3 – Assets and Challenges of Partnerships

Once you have decided that you need partners to strengthen and implement your work, you should do a careful inventory of who could be potential partners and their potential contributions.

Process Worksheet 1.5 – Potential Collaborator/Partner Worksheet

Suggestions to Help Maintain Long-term Partnerships:

1. **Get to Know Each Other** – Partnerships grow best on a firm ground of mutual knowledge and understanding. Learn about values, priorities and limitations of potential partners, and show them how they will benefit from collaboration.
2. **Maintain Open Communication** – Establish and maintain open lines of communication between key contacts at each partner organization. This is essential, particularly for partnerships consisting of organizations with no history of cooperation. Get agreements with partners in writing.
3. **Break New Ground and Old Habits** – Reach out to new and unlikely collaborators. Effective partnerships will acknowledge and overcome stereotypes, develop new learning and habits of cooperation and curb unrealistic expectations.
4. **Share Decision Making** – Share decision-making authority and responsibility equitably with the participating partners. All partners must feel welcome and believe that their contributions are valued.
5. **Share Responsibility and Costs** – Partners need to be clear about what they can contribute to any project, and it is important that the partners feel that everyone is sharing the cost of the project.
6. **Work Toward Shared Goals** – Partnerships should be based on shared goals that reflect the mutual self-interests of the participating organizations. Be aware that the missions of other partner organizations differ from your own, and understand the potential consequences of the partnership's actions for each of the partners.
7. **Be Realistic** – Know what your partners can afford to contribute to partnership projects, both in terms of time, money and other resources. Be aware of additional resources that are available from outside sources.
8. **Identify Leadership** – One organization or individual needs to take on a leadership role to sustain the partnership. The leader must not abuse the leadership position to forward an individual agenda.

9. **Secure Commitment for the Long Term** – Most partnership begin with a rush of enthusiasm. Long-term partnerships, like any strong relationship, require patience, flexibility, inclusiveness, respect for differences and a willingness to accept leadership roles. The roles and responsibilities should be clearly understood from the beginning.
10. **Plan for the Future** – Strong partnerships plan for the future by identifying mutual goals and targeting the human and financial resources required to achieve these goals.
11. **Celebrate Successes Along the Way** – Take the time to celebrate the successful completion of smaller projects along the way in order to maintain the enthusiasm for the long-term goals if the partnership.