



Improving Partnerships Series—Reflecting on Partnerships

Most organizations consider themselves to be good partners, but are they? Consider what it means to be a good partner. What is your organization doing to ensure that partnerships yield benefits for all parties from year to year? Pursue conversations that help your organization develop strategies to maintain healthy partnerships.

1. How does your organization share information with partners?

Clear, strategic communication is required for a partnership to thrive. However, few organizations have a communication plan specific to keeping partners informed. What steps do you take to ensure that your partners are informed about your organization's plans, programs, and needs? What steps do you take to ensure that you keep your organization informed about your partners' plans, programs, and needs?

2. How do all parties benefit from the partnership?

All parties should benefit from the partnership and support one another's agenda. Organizations should be able to identify the ways in which partnership is mutually beneficial. What are your partners' missions and what services do they provide? Do you ask what partners hope to achieve through partnership or do you assume that you know?

3. How do you collaborate? What steps are taken to share ownership of programs with partners?

Strengthen partnerships by valuing the strengths and talents of others outside of your organization. Collaborate in ways that enable all participants/partners to shine rather than focusing on one organization's or individual's wants and needs. Do you ask partners how they'd like to participate or do you tell them? Do you ask your partners what skills or resources they'd like to contribute? Do you follow-up to ensure partners are satisfied with collaboration?

4. How does your organization ensure that its members maintain respectful interactions with partners?

Treat colleagues with dignity and respect when agreeing or disagreeing. Be proactive to find solutions to problems instead of placing blame. Kindly ask for more information to make sure you understand why different perspectives exist. Are you comfortable discussing topics of disagreement or do these discussions make you uncomfortable or withdrawn? Do you include etiquette training when you orient members of your organization?

5. How can your organization anticipate changes in your organization and in partner organizations? How do you adapt to the changing needs and dynamics of your partners?

Adapting to change is a key aspect of sustainable organizations; the same can be said for sustainable partnerships. All organizations need to evolve to stay viable and meet the changing needs of communities. You will have new ideas and needs that impact your partners, and their growth will impact your organization, as well. Your willingness to change with evolving demands makes you a desirable partner. Do you evaluate the degree to which your programming accomplishes your mission? Do you improve or change up your events regularly or are events managed the same way each year?

