

Partner Identification Litmus Test

A great amount of research and theory exists around what it takes to make a successful business and community organization partnership. Eight underlying themes have emerged from the study of these partnerships. To successfully launch and navigate a partnership, business and community leaders need to keep in mind the following:

COMMON OBJECTIVES

Every organization will have different objectives and motivations for entering into partnership. The key is to understand these motivations and develop common goals and measurements to ensure the partnership is successful. Think about the needs of your partners to ensure the partnership's common goals encompass each organization's main objectives. The relationship needs to be a win-win for everyone involved.

LEADERSHIP

Organizations have differences in leadership styles. Executives of one organization may prefer to be hands on, others may not. Determine who from each partner organization is going to be managing the work and also who has decision making authority. Dedicating more than one partnership advocate in each organization helps ensure the relationship continues even if individuals' roles change or they leave the organization.

FLEXIBILITY

Working in partnership requires partners be adaptable to a range of situations. It is inevitable that outside influences will have an impact on the work of the partnership and its partners. Flexibility ensures leaders can deal with issues at hand, focus on the ultimate goals of the partnership and also allows for potential new opportunities to arise and help the partnership grow.

LANGUAGE/CULTURE

Differences in language and culture will exist between partners. It is important to bridge these gaps when you are building the partnership's foundation. One effective way to do so is through an intermediary, an individual or organization who can take the time to understand each of the partners, their culture, leadership, and goals. The intermediary can ensure that partners are focused on the end goals of the partnership and translate language barriers that can exist between for-profit and nonprofit organizations. A less intensive approach would involve neutral facilitation where partners hold frank conversations about language and culture barriers when the issues arise. Being open and honest and having a thick skin can help overcome any barriers.

CLEARLY DEFINED ROLES

You need to have a clear understanding of the roles each partner will play. Make sure you understand what your community partners are expecting of you and visa versa – make sure they know what you can expect of them. When kicking off a new partnership, consider getting each partner's roles and responsibilities in writing. This does not have to be a formal contract, but a short document will assist in ensuring there

is a clear understanding among partners and that a system of accountability is in place. If the partnership begins to not meet your expectations, use that document as the basis for any discussions you have with your partners.

TIMING

It is important for all partners to have a common understanding of when major milestones should be completed. Develop a schedule of activities or work plan. This schedule should include what needs to be accomplished in the next two weeks, three months and year – depending on the length of the partnership. Make sure the schedule also includes strategic points of re-evaluation to make sure that all partners are on track with progress to date. This allows for adjustments to be made as needed. For those partnerships you would like to sustain, make sure to keep setting goals and discussing future opportunities.

MEASUREMENT AND DATA

Businesses and community organizations may have different ways of defining and measuring the effectiveness of a particular initiative. Businesses are most often referring to hard, number based facts when they refer to measurement. Some nonprofits focus more on the story of their impact, the qualitative measurement, and less on the quantitative measurement. The key to a successful partnership is to find a balance between the two because both measurements are needed to accurately depict success.

COMMUNICATIONS

Ultimately to achieve these first seven tips you must have excellent communication, both among partners, within their organizations and to the public. Developing a communications strategy and feedback loop to determine what information should be communicated to particular individuals and at what time is critical.