

# Developing & Maintaining Positive Partnerships

*Tips on Developing & Using the Knowledge and  
Skills Needed for Effective Professional  
Collaboration*



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# 7 KEYS TO BUILDING SUCCESSFUL PARTNERSHIPS

## 1. Do Your Homework

- Who are the key stakeholders?
- What are their agencies/coalitions all about?
- Who is currently not at the table but should be?
- Know specifically what will constitute success for your organization.
- Know specifically what will constitute success for your partner.

## 2. Start at the Top

- Buy-in at the top makes a huge difference.
- Need to communicate the role/purpose of the partnership.
  - Tell them why you care about this work
  - Explain your background
- Discuss what ways the partnership will benefit them – how can your work help this person and their agency?
- Once the head of the agency is on board – find the agency’s internal “champion” for your cause.
  - This person will have credibility and connections to spread the message and will have far more time than you have to work with the people in their agency.
- Assign the partnership duties to employees who enjoy building consensus and are good at negotiations and conflict resolution.
- Remember that individual relationships can make or break partnerships!

## 3. Communicate

- Communicate constantly (or at least consistently)
- Meet regularly (even if there are no pressing issues to resolve)
- Do not underestimate the importance of one-on-one face time (especially at the beginning)
- Communicate the partnership’s mission
  - Why are you doing this work?
  - Why does it matter to you?
  - What are your goals?
  - What are some examples?
- Communicate the benefits you bring to the table (What’s in it for them?)
  - Can you provide information?
  - Technical assistance?
  - Funding? Access to grants?
- Know your partners’ limits in terms of budget, time and culture – and tell them yours.

#### **4. Learn**

- Much of your success will be in just showing up.
- Be ready to attend others' meetings.
  - It may seem redundant because you will be attending meetings at different locations, but most of the faces will be the same. Regardless, you need to show up.
- Consider “shadowing” key partners for a day.
- Invite others to shadow you.

#### **5. Work on Trust/Credibility**

- This may sound very lawyerly – but do not be afraid to generate a “letter of agreement” to guide the partnership. It is easy to forget what you have agreed to. Members of the partnership may change. You want to avoid misunderstandings because it will ruin the relationship.
- Return every call, email, text as soon as possible. I personally strive to achieve a “24-hour rule” to respond to all messages.
- Co-train with someone in another role.
- Share resources.
- Keep your ego in check.
- Always give credit to others.
- Work on improving your listening skills. It is crucial you understand *their* needs.
- Trust rarely comes quickly. It will be tested. It takes time, persistence and making good on your promises.
- Spend time together away from work (food/drink helps)

#### **6. Set the Table for Others to Learn**

- Host a monthly/quarterly meeting, invite key stakeholders.
- Let partners know about meetings, conferences and trainings that might be helpful to them.
- Share useful information from meetings that your partners cannot attend.

#### **7. Deliver!**

- What can help them meet their goals?
- Provide the access and resources they need.
- Be a resource!
- Make sure your partner gets a “win” out of each project – this lets them know that their interests are very high on your priority list.
- More powerful than numbers, statistics, charts and graphs is a “well told story.”