

# What Does a Successful Partnership Look Like?



For years, organizations have been partnering with each other. For years, local PBS stations have been doing the same. Along the way, lessons have been learned but often not shared and so it's easy to keep repeating mistakes or worse yet, declaring it wasn't worth it and going it alone. To make a partnership work, where organizations share in the work and in the success or failure of the project equally is sometimes still elusive. The following are characteristics that appear to factor into a successful partnership:

## Buy-in

The whole organization buys into the partnership; it's not a secret but widely known and supported from top to bottom. If someone from the outside called to talk to someone about the partnership, there would be more than one person to talk to. Better yet, buying in means that it's common knowledge what commitments have been made to be a partner. Partnership agreements can work really well.

## Buddies

Let's face it, partnerships are relationships, relationships between people and therefore personal. In fact, if people sitting at the table like each other it's the best – they are much more likely to keep each other informed, help each other out and think about each other's organizations. Like relationships, usually we can only handle so many partnerships. Buddies often mean fewer rather than more.

## Trust

Without it, partnerships won't happen. Everyone needs to know that once a commitment is made to do something, that it's going to happen as promised. In fact, each of the partners should try to do more and sing each other's praises for doing it.

## Willingness to share

Every partner brings something to the table to help carry the load, or they shouldn't be there. The partnership is based on the combined resources and spirit...the latter almost as important as the first.

## Needs, Wants & Desires

To be successful, all the project partners need shared expectations of outcomes and impact. And to get there, early on each of the partners have to be able to voice what their organization first needs to get out of the partnership, secondly what they really want and just as importantly, what would knock their socks off.

## Constant & Clear Communications

Sadly, this is one area that seems to be a source of problems. Whether it's not communicating enough, not communicating in the format that is most appropriate to each of the partners or simply forgetting to keep each other in the loop, figuring out a system from the beginning is essential.

## Ongoing Assessment

Checking in with each other both on content and the relationship is a partnership must. There's nothing like the assumption that all is going well only to find out otherwise. A predetermined schedule for revisiting goals and objectives and pulling out the partnership agreements may be the way to go.

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