



The subject of improving partnerships comes up regularly in conversation between community engagement professionals. It's a challenge for all of us and one we must grapple with to engage effectively. Fortunately, because of the great work happening in the public broadcasting system, there is much we can learn from each other.

We asked a small group of community engagement professionals to contribute tips for strengthening and sustaining partnerships. Their ideas come from years of experience and much trial and error. We hope their knowledge will help you "upgrade" your work with community partners and that you will, in turn, add your own solutions to the list. The more we share ideas the greater the impact system-wide.

- Send your tips to info@mediaengage.org

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Tip #1: Make It a Win-Win Relationship

<p>Ask your partners what goals they're trying to achieve with each project. Periodically check to make sure that the way you're working with them is helping them achieve those goals. (WGBH)</p>	<p>I try to build the needs and goals of the partnering organization into the plans we are developing. For example, the first time we worked with the YMCA, they indicated that it was important for them to have access to our outreach materials and also screeners of the documentary. We were able develop a reasonable plan to provide them with screeners and share the expense. The second time we worked together, they expressed their appreciation of this and we built it into our plan again. (TPT)</p>	<p>Partnerships need to fit the capacity and ability of the institution. Partnerships are not always "even" in effort or resources provided and yet all partners in a collaborative can play a valuable role. (WXXI)</p>
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Tip #2: Find a Shared Community Goal and Measure Against It

<p>Ground your partnership in a community need with a vision. Ask, "How do we want to move the bar around this need?" "How will we measure this movement?" Define on paper the role of each organization toward making the change. Measure your progress as a group with a metrics tool and use it internally every four months or so. (WILL)</p>	<p>The best partnerships are made with organizations that have related goals and willingness to commit resources to attaining those goals. (WXXI)</p>	<p>Establish an evaluative process of the group's activities by the audience you are trying to serve. Go back to this audience several times for evaluations over the course of the project and share the evaluations with your partners. (WILL)</p>
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Tip #3: Communicate and Adjust

<p>When we collaborate with partners, we make the effort stronger when we consistently stay in touch. It seems that frequent communication and shared decision-making opportunities help to build our joint momentum. As a result, project outcomes—whether a television program, website, or event—give us something very concrete to celebrate, further deepening the relationship. (WNED)</p>	<p>The most important thing with partnerships is good communication. We have regular conversations with them, work closely on co-branding documents and Web sites, invite them to events, and give them opportunities to see how their involvement has helped with the success of the outreach. We have found that by staying in regular contact with our partners, they feel involved in the process which furthers a desire in them to do more for the success of the program and its outreach. (TPT)</p>	<p>As a group, self-reflect and share out loud your progress and growth with each other. Help each other see how the partnership has changed the partners. (WILL)</p>
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Tip #4: Share Responsibility and Assume Goodwill

<p>Partnerships work best when there are clearly actionable goals and everyone has a clear role to play in meeting those goals. (WXXI)</p>	<p>Share leadership and authority. Be flexible and open while adhering to standards and practices established by the group. Refer back to those standards for direction when the group gets off track. Trust your partners. Respect what they bring to the table. If you don't respect them, don't partner with them. Assume goodwill in all of their actions. Ask for clarification as necessary. (WILL)</p>	<p>Alternate locations for meetings—one time at your station, the next time at their place, etc. (WGBH)</p>
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Tip #5: If it Works, Commit to the Long Haul

<p>Stick with the same partner over multiple projects to create a sustained relationship. (WGBH)</p>	<p>With new partners, start with pilot projects to see what works. Extend it if it makes sense for both partners. (WXXI)</p>	<p>If there is negative history yet substantial goodwill now, let the story of the past come up, refer to the goodwill in the room now and then move the group towards the new vision from this meeting forward. (WILL)</p>
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Tip #6: Look for Missed Opportunities

<p>Cast a wide net to be sure you're not missing any opportunities. Survey both current partners and groups you're not currently working with—local churches, legislators, youth groups, etc. Ask, how can we work with you, what do you want from us, how can we be more effective together? If you don't have the time or people-power on staff to handle the surveying, recruit college students to manage the process. You'll gain insight about what your current partners want from you and discover potential partners you may not have considered. (MontanaPBS)</p>	<p>Find out what other goals they have that may not be related to what you're currently working on together. See if there is something else going on in your station that you can bring to the table to help them achieve one or more of those goals. (WGBH)</p>	<p>Do not overlook assisting existing community collaborations and taskforces in new ways to meet the needs of your audience and region. Also use current partners to network and meet others in their field to extend your community reach. (WXXI)</p>
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