

# Your 10-Step **Playbook** for Effective Partnerships

## **1. PREPARE, PREPARE, PREPARE**

Developing a partnership starts with doing your homework to understand as much as you can about your partner's business/organization/department prior to meeting them. Review recent news articles about the organization (good and bad), see their new initiatives, as well as past efforts. Look at their social media to see what they are talking about – and what their followers are saying. If they are a public company, check their stock price and be certain to note what their critics are saying. Learn as much as you can about what is driving them in the current market and what pressures they are facing. Run these evaluations prior to meeting with them each time.

## **2. KNOW THYSELF**

Be able to express your value proposition in a way that demonstrates how/where the touchpoints are with those of your partner and the clients/customers they serve. Be confident. You have something of value to offer: an ability to deliver social impact; the opportunity to reach a new market; a trusted relationship and understanding/experience in how to best deliver what's needed on the ground, and a halo effect for your partner for their donors/investors, customers, employees, stakeholders, etc.

## **3. HAVE CLEARLY DEFINED MUTUAL GOALS**

Before you approach your partner, know what you want from the partnership – what the partner can bring to your organization and how it can help you achieve your goals. Clearly define what is in it for your partner. Ask directly and listen fully to what would make this a “win” for your partner. At the end of the day, partnerships should provide a win/win/win: for your organization, for your partner, and for the issue you are addressing.

#### **4. CO-CREATE**

Give your partners the opportunity to further their understanding of your respective work, growth pains, challenges, and establish these as opportunities to co-create new innovative ways to work together. Share the challenges you are facing -- even if they seem unrelated to your primary collaboration.

#### **5. LOOK FOR PARTNERS/LEADERS WITH AN “ACTIVIST” MINDSET**

The most effective partners are those who want to create positive social change and see themselves and their organizations in positions to advocate for and engage in making that change.

#### **6. CONSIDER LANGUAGE AND CULTURE**

There are dramatic institutional/cultural differences between corporate partners, foundations, NGOs, governmental agencies, etc. and there are also geographic/regional differences in language/culture as well. Awareness of and sensitivity to those differences are essential to making the partnership work.

#### **7. BE GENUINELY INVESTED BEYOND THE PARTNERSHIP**

Connect with partners about key developments and challenges they are facing. Acknowledge their situation and offer personal support, or ideas for how your organization might help.

#### **8. BUILD – AND ASSESS – TRUST FROM THE BEGINNING.**

A strong partnership requires that you are authentic, transparent, and open in what your organization can/can't offer and what you need to succeed. While trust is deepened over time, you can also tell pretty quickly when trust isn't there.

#### **9. BUILD IN REGULAR OPPORTUNITIES FOR TWO-WAY FEEDBACK.**

For example - establish a regular touchpoint call every 30 days. Detoxify tough discussions: focus on what's going well for each other, and then talk about what you each wish might be done differently.

#### **10. KNOW THAT PARTNERSHIPS HAVE A LIFESPAN**

When priorities, leadership, budget realities or situations change, some partners need to end their relationship. If possible, help them end on a positive note, to keep the door open for the future.