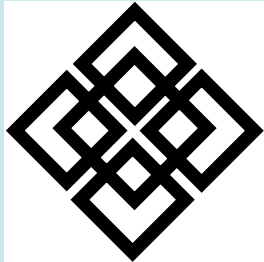


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“Successful partnerships are ones where each partner receives expected benefits.”

Strategic Partnering: Partnering for Change

By Connie Coley Loden

Introduction: Why Partner?

The answer to the question, “Why partner?” is easy. Partnerships allow an organization to multiply their resources and do more with less. With today’s struggle for budget dollars and shrinking program funds, the ability to do more with less is a necessity. Also, in a partnership that works – the whole is always greater than the sum of the individual parts.

Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary, 10th Edition (1993) provides the following definition of partnership:

“A partnership is a formal relationship usually involving close cooperation between parties having specified joint rights and responsibilities.”

Partnerships result from building relationships and maintaining them. The relationship provides the foundation for partnership. Partnerships involve working together to achieve a mutually defined goal or vision. To assist in maintaining the relationship, methods for achieving the goals and vision should be outlined through partnership agreements. These agreements may be formal or informal. Successful partnerships are ones where each partner receives expected benefits. This is the glue that holds the partnership together. The purpose of this publication is to explore the idea and value of strategic partnering.

Traditional and Strategic Partnerships:

Partnerships come in several types and the various types have different purposes and applications. (See Table One, below.)

Because they often take on multiple goals over time, strategic partnerships become more formal with rights and responsibilities clearly defined.

Some partnerships also evolve and change. They can evolve from informal cooperation into traditional partnerships to take on a specific goal. Upon completion of the goal the partners may determine they have a shared vision, and that moving into a more formal, strategic partnership helps both partners move toward this shared vision.

Wisconsin Rural Partners and Wisconsin Rural Leadership Program are examples of this. They began a relationship by both lending their names to an event – the Wisconsin Rural Summit. The Summit is hosted by Wisconsin Rural Partners (WRP). To gain participation of the Wisconsin Rural Leadership Program members, WRP partnered up to have them as a sponsor and lend their name to the event. This initial infor-

Table 1.	Traditional Partnership	Strategic Partnership
Motivation	Specific Goal	Shared Vision
Resources	Sameness	Diversity
Working Model	Achievement: Desire, Cooperation	Entrepreneurial: Courage, Risk
Duration	Until Goal is Achieved	Until new goals evolve

mal partnering for a specific goal led to organizations which have grown together to deliver a State-wide Community Resource Network with leadership development to build capacity as a main ingredient. (See case study and graphic on Community Resource Network on page 9.)

In identifying the benefits and addressing the challenges of creating partnerships, communication is extremely important, in addition to understanding the roles and assets that each partner brings to the table. Many challenges can be minimized by being ready to partner.

TABLE 2. Characteristics of Strategic Partnerships tend to include:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Being intersectorial – Public/Private/Non-Profit - Having diverse stakeholders - Exercising diffuse leadership - Having transparent, participatory structures - Developing open communication systems - Making decisions based on consensus 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Being open to outcome and change - Relying on trust among the partners and in the process - Being willing to suspend personal/hidden agendas - Being reliant on shared or complementary vision
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Editor:
David L. Darling

Reviewers:
Cheryl Burkhart-Kriesel
Anne Hiens
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Readiness to Partner

To determine the readiness of your organization to partner and the resulting mutual benefits the following questions should be asked.

- Who are the Partners?
- What are the benefits in partnering with these partners?
- What will be the partnership structure?
- What are the obstacles?
- What are the strengths?
- What results can be created?

Evaluating the answers to these questions, helps to determine your organization's readiness to partner.

To determine your organization's readiness to partner use the Readiness to Partner Worksheet.

Stages of Partnerships

Partnership trainer, Debra Perry, uses the courtship model to identify the stages of developing partnership. It is easy to see the importance of



TABLE THREE: Strategic Partnership Benefits	Strategic Partnership Challenges
<p>Strategic partnerships create continued benefits that may continue and grow as the relationship matures. Some of these benefits include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourages value alignment • Requires systems thinking • Uses simplicity and common sense • Promotes collaboration • Pools resources • Synergy of ideas • Help/division of tasks • Advances community-based priorities • Creates sustainable outcomes • Promotes continuous learning <p>Elements to consider in developing and choosing partnerships that result in creating mutual benefits are:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Skills of the Partner – Necessary attitudes, knowledge and skills of the individuals involved. 2. Enabling Environment – The formal or informal social, political, economic and cultural conditions which shape the incentives and opportunities for growth. 3. The Desired Outcome – Is the desired outcome a specific objective or strategic change? Do you have the time available to realize results? <p>The issue of mutual benefit is the glue in the partnership.</p>	<p>The challenges of a strategic partnership can be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sharing of power • Loss of control • Increased accountability • Turf issues (i.e. power, control, perceived ownership) • The time involved in organizing and maintaining a partnership • Commitment of other resources such as money, vehicles, office space, and materials <p>All of these challenges can be overcome, if addressed and considered in the development of the partnership. Of particular consideration is addressing autonomy. Creating a partnership does not mean an organization needs to lose its autonomy. It may be important to organizations to maintain their autonomy. In those cases, it must be clearly communicated.</p>

building a relationship to the success of the partnership. Each stage asks a question.

1. Assessing Readiness: Coming of Age - *Outcome:* Decision to Partner – Are you ready to partner?
2. Networking and Market Research: Dating - *Outcome:* Target a Partner(s) – Are we compatible?
3. Promotional/Solicitation: Proposal and Acceptance- *Outcome:* Agreement to work together – Do you want to work together?
4. Planning and Commitment: Engagement and Wedding – *Outcome:* Development and commitment to a Partnership Plan- Will we commit to working together?
5. Implementation: Honeymoon – *Outcome:* Action – How do we set up housekeeping and get off to a good start?
6. True Partnership: The Marriage – *Outcome:* Mutual Benefits – Is the partnership working?
7. Reassessment: Completion, Divorce, Renewing Vows – *Outcome:* Renewal or Dissolution – What do we do next?

Strategic partnerships often move between 6 and 7

The Courtship model stresses building a relationship to aid the success of a partnership.

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If real, sustainable change is sought, a strategic partnership may be the desired approach.

Importance of Trust, Communication, Evaluation and Fun

Because trust plays such a key role in creating successful partnerships, some emphasis on tips for building trust seem appropriate.

- Consensus – Work on common ground areas first.
- Truthfulness – identify agendas – no hidden agendas
- Why you don't agree – identifying this clearly
- Working agreements – Ground Rules – identify and adhere to them
- Following through on commitment – do what you say
- Integrity – a really important ingredient

Cohesion bonds partners and creates synergy. Finding ways to stimulate cohesion can assist in forming strong, dynamic partnerships with sustainability. A few of effective examples are:

- Retreats
- Fun Things
- Risk Sharing

When building new partnerships, don't set your expectations too high. Partnership development takes time to evolve, but the pay-offs can be huge by adding some patience. See Table 4 for more characteristics of successful partnerships.

Summary: The strategic partnership difference

Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, 10th Edition (1993) provides the following definition of Partnership, "A partnership is a formal relationship usually involving close cooperation between parties having specified joint rights and responsibilities." Also, Webster's Thesaurus (1993) states that strategy is synonymous with technique, management, tactics, approach, and design.

Effective strategic partnerships harness the benefits of partnering while meeting the partnership challenges. A key factor of a strategic partnership is openness to possibilities. Partnership development is an art. There is no right way for every situation. If a specific goal or objective is desired, and help is wanted to achieve it, a traditional partnership might be the path to follow. If real, sustainable change is sought, and the enabling environment is conducive, a strategic partnership surfaces as the desired approach.



Strategic Partnering Worksheet: Are You Ready to Partner?

These worksheet questions should be answered for all parties in the partnership.

Does your organization have a mission and specific goals? (Yes/No) If yes, describe them.

Is there clear understanding of your organization's strengths and weaknesses? (Yes/No. Explain)

Is the leadership stable and is the organization sufficiently developed to handle a partnering relationship? (Yes/No. Explain)

Is the organization flexible and willing to change? (Yes/No. Explain)

Is there clarity about the problem or issue to be addressed by the partnership? (Yes/No. Explain)

What are each partner's expectations for partnership?

What does your organization have to offer the partnership?

What do you need or would like contributed from other partners to make the partnership worth pursuing?

Does the current environment support the partnership? (Yes/No. Explain – if not, what needs to change?)

Hold 3 month follow up / progress updates



TABLE 4. The I's of Partnering – Checklist to Effective Partnerships

Some of the characteristics of successful partnerships are reflected in the following I's of Partnering, as outlined by Rosabeth Moss Kanter in her Harvard Business Review article *Collaborative Advantage: The Art of Alliances*.

✓	Individual Excellence: Competency – Each partner should be competent and have something to offer the other partner(s)
✓	Importance: Shared Vision/Goals – The goal or vision is shared and important to each of the partners. The relationship should play a key role in the achievement of the goal or vision.
✓	Interdependence: Complementary Skills and Resources – Partners have complimentary skills and resources that they are willing to share. By working together they can achieve more than either could individually.
✓	Investment: Commitment, Pooled Resources and Shared Responsibility/Liability – Partners make a commitment to each other by investing in the partnership in some way. The investment need not be financial. Investment implies that risk and liability are shared although it might not always be equal.
✓	Information: Communication Mechanism and Openness to Sharing Information – Partners should have a clear and open communication system in which information and ideas are shared openly and regularly.
✓	Integration: Flexible Structure and Linkages – Partners should have a flexible structure and linkages. Integration may be strategic (goals and objectives), tactical (plan, project or specific activities), operational (day-to-day activities), interpersonal (personal connections between people) and cultural (norms, values and styles).
✓	Integrity: Trust – Honesty and integrity are critical to the success of any partnership. Partners must be able to trust each other for the partnership to survive and thrive.
✓	Institutionalization: Formal Status of the Relationship – Formal partnership status comes with clear responsibilities and decision-making processes. It extends beyond the individuals who formed the partnership to the organizations involved.

A Case Study: Wisconsin Resource Network for Rural Communities

The missions of the two organizations of Wisconsin Rural Partners and Wisconsin Rural Leadership Program certainly have cross over and alignment to facilitate a partnership where working toward the shared vision creates benefits for both organizations.

Wisconsin Rural Partners Mission: “To engage rural partners to identify issues, and through collaborative actions, enhance rural community life.”

Wisconsin Rural Leadership Program Mission and Vision: “Leadership Development for Stronger Communities -- Creating catalysts to strengthen communities.”

Objective of the *Resource Network for Rural Communities*:

To strengthen rural communities through providing easy access to applicable community economic development tools, ideas and resources



through creating networks, building community capacity and sharing expertise across a broad spectrum of cross sector partnerships.

Wisconsin Rural Partners' *Resource Network for Rural Communities* integrates a variety of complimentary community economic development programs, allowing the maximum synergy and ability of programming to build on each other and multiply the results. One of the major partners in this effort is the Wisconsin Rural Leadership Program as its network of graduates and affiliates maximizes resources and increases exposure to available programming.

Process of Program Development. From the four statewide "Rural Summits" Wisconsin Rural Partners hosted in the past six years, we have learned that the greatest need among communities is not more programs and services, but better ways to access and implement existing programs and services.

As the partnership evolved and transformed over the past 4 years, from co-sponsorship on a Wisconsin Rural Summit to offering a suite of programming, through a model of collaboration, we have developed effective ways to build capacity and improve access for rural residents and communities – creating stronger rural communities through the Resource Network for Wisconsin Rural Communities.

This diagram shows how the collaborative programming is designed to create stronger rural communities.

Elements of the Resource Network, in which Wisconsin Rural Partners partners strategically with Wisconsin Rural Leadership Program:

Wisconsin Rural Summit 5

The objective of the Wisconsin Rural Summit is to convene rural interests from throughout the State to identify to top issues facing rural Wisconsin, and recommend actions for addressing these issues. This was the first program of partnership between Wisconsin Rural Partners and Wisconsin Rural Leadership Program. It was more of a goal specific collaboration initially, which led to working together to develop and enhance additional programming creating mutual benefit.

Leadership Development: Wisconsin Community Leadership Summit

The purpose of the Wisconsin Community Leadership Summit is to build stronger Wisconsin communities through a forum of leadership development, creating networks and collaboration in leadership. The forum offers tools, training in development processes along with providing research and policy assessments. Wisconsin Rural Partners' joins forces with the Wisconsin Rural Leadership Program in developing, promoting and implementing events and activities, which increase the capacity for rural leadership development in Wisconsin.

Community Development: On-Line Resource Network

The On-Line Resource Network is a WRP Initiative to build a community development program and assistance directory in an on-line format. The Task Group's objective for 2002 is to establish an Internet web



site and administrative support structure, which provides a “one-stop” network of resources for local rural community leaders. Through the Wisconsin Rural Leadership Program network affiliation a web designer has been accessed

Community Resource Team Program

The Community Resource Teams deliver on-site community economic development assistance by providing an outside assessment of a community. The Community Resource Team members listen to issues of concern or opportunity at scheduled listening sessions from cross sector segments of the community. This program is also designed to be a professional development opportunity for those who serve on the assessment team, as often they are community development workers or agency staff serving other communities. Many of the team and task group members, which administer the program, are Wisconsin Rural Leadership Program graduates and faculty members.

Top Rural Development Initiatives Program

Wisconsin’s Top Rural Development Initiatives recognizes effective rural development projects that can be replicated by other communities. These projects are selected from nominations and showcased through a variety of ways including Best Practice Mobile Workshops, presentations at the Wisconsin Community Leadership Summit, “Community Profiles” publication (a more in-depth study of selected outstanding projects/programs) and Top Rural Development Initiatives publication (a summary of all initiatives recognized). Wisconsin Rural Leadership Program co-hosts award celebrations and Best Practice Mobile Workshops to spread the ability of communities to learn from each other.

Wisconsin Rural Partners and Wisconsin Rural Leadership Program both benefit in these collaborative efforts, as the end result is building stronger communities, which is part of both organizations’ mission.

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The Resource Network for Rural Communities

