Community Partners – Choosing and Being Chosen

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Partnerships! Collaborations! When it comes to conducting successful community efforts, everyone says working together is the answer. How can you know which community organizations will be good partners? Partnerships are only worthwhile if the partners, as well as the participants, benefit and move toward their goals. When partners contribute what they do best, projects are stronger programmatically, reach more people, offer more programs, and are more cost effective. Carefully chosen partners and projects increase the likelihood that the effort will be a good one.

Purpose

The purpose of this carousel is to share information that can help to identify promising partners and projects.

Information to be Shared

Establishing a good partnership is challenging because all organizations do not share Extension’s ethics, vision, mission, and motivation. Doing some homework to identify positive indicators before forming a partnership can save months of difficulty and stress later. An organization that is likely to be a good partner has a compatible vision, mission, and values, has similar attitudes about fiscal and human resource management, has the expertise you need, is enthusiastic, is respected in the community, and their mission fits with the project goals.

A community organization may not be a good choice if it is not a good match philosophically, lacks or has difficulty contributing in-kind or matching resources, does not seem genuinely interested, is difficult to work with on the proposal, is slow to respond and keep its promises, does not provide its parts of the proposal on time, and/or has a community reputation of being predatory. Sometimes large and obvious organizations may not be the right partner for your project. Even if they share goals and mission, they tend to be self-contained, less flexible, and more demanding. Smaller, less known organizations may be more flexible, cooperative, and anxious to work with you because they need to leverage their resources in order to expand or enhance their services.

To be sought after as a partner, other organizations need to know about your organization’s values, vision, and mission. Being in the right place at the right time to be invited to be a partner requires consistent community behavior and trust. When you are invited to be a partner for a project, make sure it contributes to your organization’s goals, that you have time and interest, and the structure to support the work. If other community organizations do not ask you to be partner, they may not know you. Be active in community networks and service groups. Participate in public events. Volunteer for other organizations. Create opportunities for others to get to know you.

Conclusion and Educational Importance

It takes time to be selective and confident about organizations you choose as partners for your projects, so these important inquiries are often ignored. Carefully considering the projects and organizations to which you say, “yes” to a partnership also takes some effort, but it yields involvement with projects and partners that help you reach goals that are important to you and your organization. Partnerships let you stretch your program dollars and extend your program.