

STRENGTHENING & SUSTAINING STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS

i Introduction

Whether formed across sectors, within the community, or among other mission driven organizations, strategic partnerships are built on shared values, trust, and commitment to collective impact.

But building these partnerships is just the first step. Sustaining these partnerships requires you to go deeper in your relationship with your partners and build a shared sense of purpose that drives you to adapt and innovate. This ongoing effort is what transforms simple connections to collaborations that are capable of driving impact.

It is through nurturing and strengthening these relationships that partnerships can unlock their full potential and create lasting change.



1

Best Practices for Fostering Trust & Shared Vision

Trust is the currency of sustainable partnerships. A clear, shared vision provides the roadmap for collective action.

- **Consistent Communication:** Maintain regular, transparent communication. This goes beyond formal meetings and includes informal check-ins.
- **Active Listening:** Genuinely listen to partner perspectives, concerns, and ideas. Demonstrate that their input is valued.
- **Mutual Respect:** Acknowledge and respect the unique strengths, expertise, and organizational cultures of each partner.
- **Shared Ownership:** Ensure all partners feel a sense of ownership over the partnership's goals and activities. Distribute responsibilities equitably.
- **Celebrate Small Wins:** Acknowledge and celebrate milestones and achievements, both large and small. This builds morale and reinforces the value of collaboration.
- **Conflict Resolution Strategy:** Establish an agreed-upon process for addressing disagreements or challenges constructively. Focus on solutions, not blame.
- **Revisit and Refine Vision:** Periodically revisit the partnership's original vision and goals. Are they still relevant? Do they need to evolve? This ensures continued alignment.

Watch the Webinar
tinyurl.com/CEM-StratPartners2



Case Study: Action for a Better Community, Inc.

 Rochester, NY



Action for a Better Community (ABC) in Rochester, NY was chosen to collaborate in the [Strengthening Working Families Initiative \(SWFI\)](#) which brought together a broad spectrum of cross sector organizations in their community. This five-year grant through the U.S. Department of Labor gave an opportunity to work towards a common goal, helped build capacity and resource sharing, and ensured that all components of the collaborative were addressed. Beyond the SWFI grant, these strong partnerships helped to forge collaborations such as The Trainers Network to address training related community needs in Rochester.

2

Best Practices for Structured Engagement & Governance

Strong partnerships thrive on a balance of flexibility and structure. Flexibility allows partners to adapt and grow, while structure provides the clarity, accountability, and alignment needed to stay focused on a shared mission.

- **Clear Roles and Responsibilities:**

Document who is responsible for what. This minimizes duplication of effort and prevents tasks from falling through the cracks. A Responsibility Assignment Matrix (RACI Matrix – Responsible, Accountable, Consulted, Informed) can be helpful.

- **Regular Meeting Cadence:** Establish a consistent schedule for partnership meetings (e.g., weekly, bi-weekly, monthly, quarterly).

- **Effective Meeting Management:**

- **Clear Agendas:** Circulate agendas in advance with specific objectives for each meeting.
- **Time Management:** Stick to the agenda and agreed-upon timeframes.
- **Meeting Minutes:** Distribute concise minutes summarizing discussions, decisions, action items, and deadlines.

- **Formal Agreements (as needed):** For complex partnerships or those involving significant resource sharing, a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) or Partnership Agreement can formalize commitments, roles, and dispute resolution processes. Regularly review and update these agreements.

- **Dedicated Partnership Coordinator:** Consider assigning a specific individual or team to manage and nurture the partnership relationship.

Case Study: Enrichment Services Program, Inc.

 Columbus, GA



Enrichment Services Program, Inc. (ESP) in Columbus, GA maintains strong partnerships with county, city, and state governments. Through continued engagement with the community and local leaders, ESP's strategic collaborations have led to initiatives such as the Supportive Housing for Independence and Nurturing Environments (SHINE) pilot and a social enterprise developed in partnership with the local minor league baseball stadium to build unrestricted funding.

3

Best Practices for Measuring & Communicating Impact

Demonstrating collective impact is crucial for sustaining partnerships, attracting further funding, and building public trust.

- **Develop Shared Metrics:** Collaboratively define key performance indicators (KPIs) and outcomes that all partners agree to measure. These should align with your economic mobility goals (e.g., increase in income, job placement rates, reduction in poverty, improved educational attainment).
- **Collect Data Consistently:** Establish clear processes for data collection, sharing, and analysis among partners. Ensure data privacy and security protocols are in place.
- **Regular Reporting:** Provide consistent updates on progress towards shared goals to all partners and relevant stakeholders.
- **Tell the Story:** Beyond numbers, share qualitative data and success stories that illustrate the partnership's human impact.
- **Disseminate Successes:** Publicly celebrate and share the partnership's achievements through various channels (e.g., annual reports, newsletters, social media, press releases). This reinforces value and encourages engagement.
- **Utilize Data for Learning:** Use data for both learning and continuous improvement. Analyze what's working, what's not, and adjust strategies accordingly.

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General Best Practices for Sustaining Strategic Partnerships

- **Continuous Evaluation and Adaptation:** Regularly assess what's working and what's not, and be willing to adjust your strategies and approaches.
- **Invest in Relationships:** Nurture the personal relationships between individuals at partner organizations. Strong personal ties can weather many challenges.
- **Transparency and Honesty:** Be upfront about challenges, limitations, and successes.
- **Look for New Opportunities:** Continuously scan the environment for new challenges or opportunities that the partnership can address together.



Reflection & Discussion Questions

- What are some of the biggest challenges your Community Action Agency (CAA) has faced in sustaining existing partnerships? How can the strategies discussed today help address them?
- What community assets (people, places, institutions) are currently underutilized in your existing partnerships, and how could they be engaged?
- How can your CAA more effectively measure and share its partnerships' collective impact?
- What innovative strategies for deepening engagement or resolving conflict have you witnessed or implemented in your own work?