

Nonprofit Partnerships: Strategies that Work

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Anybody ...

“I guess a partner can be anybody ... right?!”

- Ingrid, child development non-profit.

Defining partnerships/collaborations

- When a group of two or more entities join together to pool common interests, resources, activities, and skills in order to promote broader goals and outcomes for the group's benefit and/or to achieve social change.
 - Partnerships are relationships
 - Collaborations are processes

Why does your organization collaborate?

Please use your Index cards.

Why do non-profits collaborate?

To improve capacity at critical levels:

- Within members
- Within relationships
- Within organizational structures
- Within programs

Source: Foster-Fishman, P. G., Berkowitz, S. L., Lounsbury, D. W., Jacobson, S., & Allen, N. A. (2001). Building collaborative capacity in community coalitions: A review and integrative framework. *American journal of community psychology*, 29(2), 241-261.

Examples of common goals

- Leverage resources
- Pursue joint funding
- Reduce costs
- Increase service impact
- Increase visibility
- Professional development and training
- Improve organizational structure
- Political leverage

How does your non-profit collaborate?

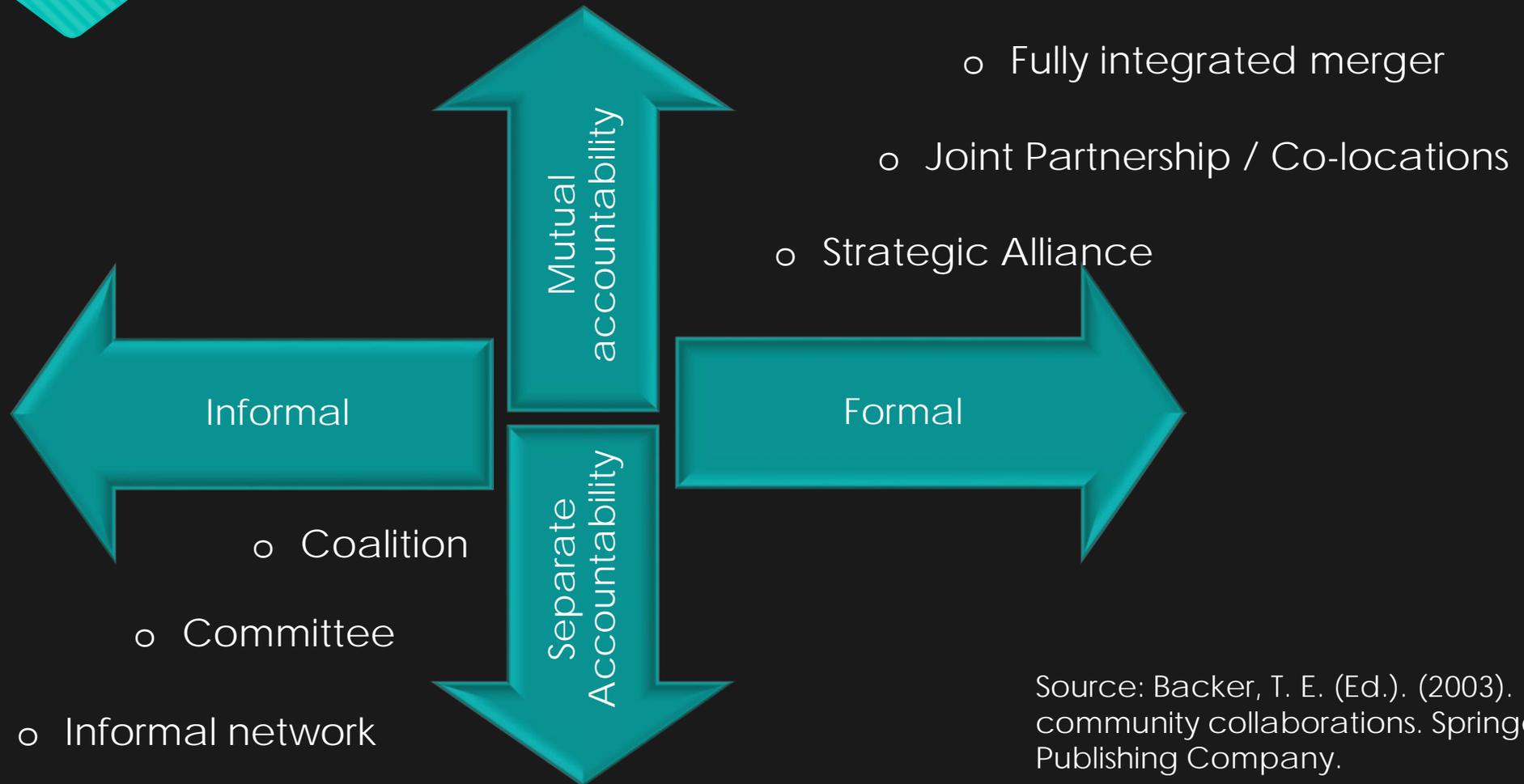
Please use your Index cards.

It's not just about an agreement ...

"When you have a partnership, it's not just about an agreement to do a program. It is really two organizations of people who get to know each other and trust each other, and then call on each other when they need each other."

- Ingrid, child development non-profit.

Modes of Interorganizational Collaboration



Source: Backer, T. E. (Ed.). (2003). Evaluating community collaborations. Springer Publishing Company.

Research Methodology

Research Questions

- a) What are the different modes of interorganizational collaboration among San Fernando Valley nonprofits?
- b) What types of interorganizational collaboration are most successful both in service provision and in establishing sustainable structures of collaboration?
- c) What is the role of trust, power, and resource dependency in developing interorganizational collaborations?

Methods

- Interviews with representatives from 19 San Fernando Valley non-profits
- Ethnographic observations and informal discussions
- Organizational size: staff of 3 members to staff of 100+
- Purposive and snowball sampling methods

Sample

Organizations included those focusing on community health and wellbeing:

- child development;
- domestic and sexual violence;
- homeless services;
- family resources;
- community empowerment;
- health care;
- senior care;
- substance abuse

Interview Questions

1. With **which organizations** does your nonprofit currently partner?
2. Of these, **what types of partnerships** are they?
3. For **what purposes** do you have these partners?
4. What types of partnerships have you found to be **most beneficial**?
5. Among your existing partnerships, **how did the collaborations form**?
6. When seeking a partnership, **what qualities** and/or features do you look for?
7. What types of **barriers** prevent you from successful partnerships?
8. What is the importance of **trust** in building collaborations with other non-profits?
9. How have the **recent elections** shaped your partnerships with other non-profit organizations?

Interview Questions

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9. How have the **recent elections** shaped your partnerships with other non-profit organizations?

Research Results

Common themes

1. Types of partners
2. Types of partnership relationships
3. Intentionality in partnership formation
4. Purposes
5. Qualities
6. Common barriers
7. Trust
8. Post-election partnerships

Social challenges demand that we partner ...

" I don't know how nonprofits do their work without partnerships ... It's critical. I think the social challenges, the social justice issues, the issues of inequality in our society demand that we partner. They just do. I don't know how you would forge ahead."

- Eliza, family services and domestic violence nonprofit.

Types of Partners

Colleges &
Universities

Hospitals and
Clinics

Community
Based Orgs

Volunteers &
Interns

Members

Donors

Faith-based

Law
Enforcement

Legal
Services

Health
Insurance
Companies

County
Agencies

Community
Members

Neighborhood
Councils

Elected
Officials

Corporate
Sponsors

Everybody is co-wrangling ...

“When I sit down and talk about it and look at it ... it’s a little overwhelming ... When we’re working day by day, it feels more natural, and it doesn’t seem like it’s overwhelming. But, when I look at this list, in some way, everybody is co-wrangling with everybody else.”

- Candy, family service non-profit.

Types of partnership relationships

Formal partners - financial

Memorandum of Understanding

Networks of funded subcontractors

Co-locations

Collaborations in response to RFPs

Letters of support

Strategic coalitions

Coalition participation

Memberships

Community councils

Community action groups

Reciprocal training

Informal networks

Warm handoffs

Service referrals

Intentionality in partnership formation

Partnerships and the “dating metaphor.”

- Stage 1: Playing the field.

“Saying ‘yes’ to a lot ... and see where it leads.”

- Stage 2: Weighing options.

“You can go out [and, if things don’t work out] it doesn’t mean the person is bad. It’s just not for you.”

- Stage 3: Falling in love ... maybe.

“You shouldn’t develop trust until you’ve developed a relationship ... ‘I’m in love!’ Welllll, maybe you’re in lust!”

Intentionality in partnership formation

Partnerships and the “dating metaphor.”

- Stage 4: Consulting.

“You have to do your due diligence whenever you try to partner with anybody ... What is their track record? ... And then if you really want to do more digging, you ask your board or you ask your other partners.”

- Stage 5: Coupling / Uncoupling.

Becoming “a lot more picky because we have so many partnerships.”

- Stage 6: Commitment.

“Anchor partners” – collaborative BFFs

- Stage 7: Union.

“If this is going to work, it’s like a forever thing. You gotta really be into this, and you’re gonna do this.”

We're better together ...

"We also believe that, philosophically, we're better together. That there's a synergy that results from one plus one plus one ... We're way greater than just the sum of the individual parts."

- Candy, family service non-profit.

Purposes

- Extend mission
- Complementary specializations
- Similar specializations (geographic expansion)
- Make the agency stronger
- More financial power to negotiate
- Tactical ... goal-directed
- Following strategic plan
- Fill gaps in services
- Improve services

Qualities

- No agenda
- Flexibility
- Treat people with dignity
- Hearts of compassion
- Match mission
- Make a commitment and follow through
- Mutual benefit & mutual need
- Trust
- Stability
- Mutual respect
- Positive reputation
- High quality services
- Culturally competent services

A culture different than that ...

“There seems to be this sense of competitiveness ... ‘Oh, well when so-and-so delivers this service, they do it this way. And, when someone else does it, they do it that way.’ And, then they just fight against each other for the funds ... And that is detrimental to the community. I think someone [I with whom I want to collaborate] ... has a culture different than that, that is more collaborative, that is driven by the vision of partnering with communities to improve upon what’s there.”

- Cynthia, child development non-profit.

It's no secret ...

"We always have collaboration through grants. I think we have developed a relationship where you compete on some things, but at the same time, you're open about what you're competing. It's no secret."

- Mariana, family service non-profit.

Barriers

Resources

- Bandwidth
- Money
- Equipment
- Staff
- In-house expertise

Instability

- Intermittent participation
- Staff instability / lack of institutional memory / starting relationships over
- Fear of change

Easy to become reactionary ...

"I think in any nonprofit, it can be easy to become reactionary because there's just a ton that goes on every day. Taking that time to step back and be strategic and stuff can be hard."

- May, homeless services non-profit.

Barriers

Organizational Culture

- Lack of flexibility
- Too much bureaucracy / hierarchy
- Incompatible mission and philosophy
- Driven by self-interested agenda
- “Lack heart”
- Advisory boards
- Risk management
- Legal issues (e.g., mandated reporting) & confidentiality

They don't know how to partner ...

"There are a few organizations in town that ... they don't know how to partner. You can see that their goal always is to come and try to take as much for themselves as possible. They're not good at sharing. There's no humility."

- Candy, family service non-profit.

Trust

- Risk - A probability of damage, injury, loss or liability caused by external or internal vulnerabilities, and that may be avoided through preemptive action.
 - Risks are managed formally, often legally, through contractual relationships.
- Uncertainty - Situation where the consequences or nature of extent conditions is unpredictable and the probabilities of outcomes cannot be determined.
 - Uncertainties are managed informally and socio-emotionally through trust.

Trust

"Trust is HUGE."

Constancy
Transparency
Critical
Huge Time
Earnesty
Following-through
Paramount
Relationship

I don't even know where to start ...

"Trust is huge in any partnership for me. I don't even know where to start to explain that. It's so important. We need to be on the same page and have a shared understanding that, I'm going to do my part, you're going to do your part, and we're going to be in communication. When obstacles occur, we're going to have a plan to overcome them. It is so important. It can be the biggest barrier, or a huge derailment when there isn't trust. It's huge."

- Janice, child development non-profit.

Nobody's going to walk out on you ...

"Strong relationships ... can call each other for whatever we need, whenever we need. Very honest. And, often the things that come up where we need to give each other feedback ... And you know nobody's going to walk out on you. You are going to go, 'You know, I really need to say this. I am worried about this, or this, and this.' What's really nice is that we have that kind of relationship. We can talk like that."

- Ingrid, child development non-profit.

Partnerships Post-Election

Immediate Effects of the 2016 Election

On Nonprofits:

- Concerns about funding
- Uncertainty about the status of Affordable Care Act, Immigration Laws

On Clients

- Heightened anxiety, stress
- Decrease in participation/attendance (appointments, programs, services)

People are fearful...

"If you're a community clinic and you're seeing a drop in your appointments, because people are fearful that they don't want to come out of their house because they might get detained or deported, then we have a problem."

- Victor, Community empowerment non-profit.

"And what we were told is that they heard there was, I don't know, police officers, there was going to be a raid or something. So, they were just scared to come to the program. And I've never seen it as real as this Tuesday. I can't believe no one showed up."

- Christina, Healthcare non-profit.

What affects other agencies...

"We're unique in that we're completely privately funded, so in the sense of funding changing for us, it doesn't necessarily. But because we rely so heavily on partnerships, and their funding might be affected, that affects us. What affects other agencies is going to affect us."

- May, homeless services non-profit.

Proactive Measures

Internally

- Printed and distributed Red Cards from Immigrant Legal Resource Center
- Developed safety plans for their waiting rooms
- Taught staff how to respond if ICE arrives or operations occur

With Partners

- More advocacy at the local and state-level (e.g., sign-on letters)
- Brought in lawyers and speakers for staff and clients/referred to legal services
- Were explicit in their values and intentions when forming partnerships
- Shared resources with each other (Know your rights, safety plans)

Marching arm in arm...

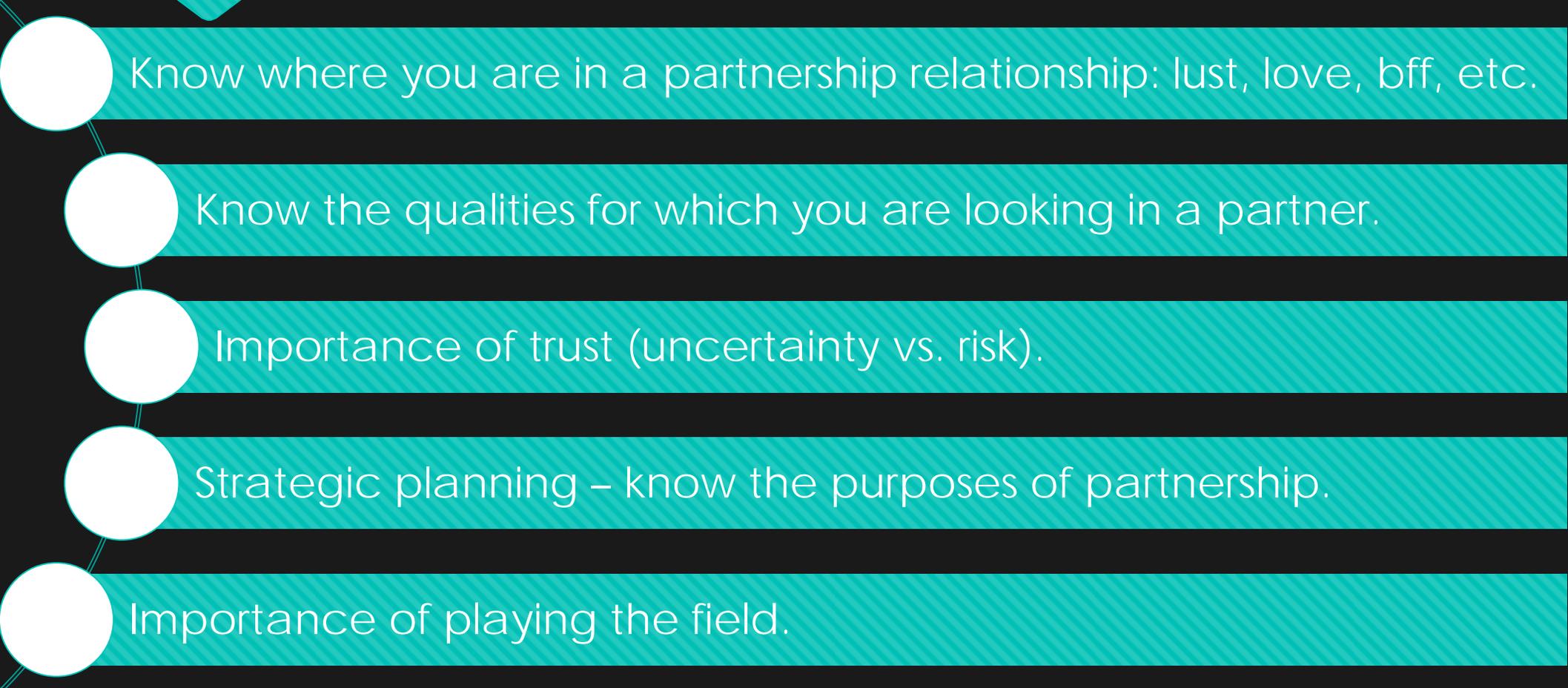
"How do we use our partnerships to amplify our voices even further, to not be diluted, to not be marginalized, marching arm in arm, together *against everything* that this administration—*everything*—that this administration stands for, and to buck each other up in light of everything that happens."

"It's like we *run* to our partners to get solace and sustenance."

- Candy, family service non-profit.

Recommendations

Recommendations



Know where you are in a partnership relationship: lust, love, bff, etc.

Know the qualities for which you are looking in a partner.

Importance of trust (uncertainty vs. risk).

Strategic planning – know the purposes of partnership.

Importance of playing the field.

Recommendations



Acknowledge complementarities – web of interdependence.

Intentionality (being "picky") ... but ... know the limits to self-interest.

Understand partner's barriers (e.g., based on their structure, culture, resources, etc.) and be self-reflective about your own limitations.

Acknowledge that we are in tricky times – the importance of "marching arm in arm."

Thank you!!!

Questions or Comments?