

## EFFECTIVE PRACTICE: DEVELOPING PARTNERSHIPS--FIVE LESSONS LEARNED

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### **Issue(s) Being Addressed:**

Developing a partnership with a community organization can be a daunting challenge. As an AmeriCorps\*VISTA this is a major part of my duties as I strive to help community partners and collegiate institutions have a healthy and productive collaboration. This year, partnerships with two local organizations were formed. The purpose of these partnerships was to provide quality service experiences for college students and to provide necessary volunteers to both organizations. Of the two partnerships, one was considered successful while the other did not proceed as anticipated. There were successes and failures with both partnerships from which to learn. Through out this experience, five lessons were learned that will help others working to develop partnerships.

### **Lesson 1: Work to develop a strong relationship from the beginning.**

This will ensure the partnership becomes sustainable beyond the initial liaisons from each organization. Connors & Seifer (2000) suggest 9 principles in developing partnerships. One of the principles contends, "the relationship between partners is characterized by mutual trust, respect, genuineness and commitment" (p. 19). This type of relationship will ensure that the partnership will sustain itself. One of the first steps in developing a strong relationship is for the liaisons to develop a mutual trust and respect for each other. This will look different for each partnership and the liaisons involved. One may develop trust by having friendly conversation while another may take more time to develop mutual trust and respect for the other liaison. The key is that both liaisons put effort into creating a successful working relationship.

### **Lesson 2: Set goals and expectations for both parties.**

This establishes a means to assess the impact of the partnership, as well as a way to demonstrate that it has been productive and beneficial to both organizations. Goal setting can also help identify underlying reasons for establishing the relationship. According to The Council of Independent Colleges (2002), this is key in developing a sustainable relationship. Goal setting is helpful in determining each organization's strengths and weaknesses, which further aids in determining practical responsibilities for both parties.

### **Lesson 3: Communicate openly and frequently.**

A successful partnership has open and frequent communication. This communication could take on many forms, telephone calls, e-mail or personal visits. Partnerships with open and frequent communication will be more likely to succeed than ones with irregular communication. Poor communication could cause a partnership to be less productive than it has the potential to become. It is a good idea to develop strong expectations and standards for communication. According to Connors & Seifer (2000) this open communication will eventually lead to a more sustainable relationship.

### **Lesson 4: A little research will go a long way.**

Taking the time to understand a partner organization: what they do, the population served, and what the partnership could become, will be very beneficial in the long run. Understanding the context in which the organization operates will help when working with them. Universities and non-profit organizations often work on different calendars, with different values and with different clientele. Understanding the culture of the organization one is working with will help ensure realistic expectations and goals (The Council of Independent Colleges, 2002).

### **Lesson 5: Learn from your triumphs and mistakes.**

Detailed documentation and some foresight will help to ensure that a partnership will be both strong and sustainable. Detailed documentation will also help future liaisons avoid repeat mistakes and triumph from successes.

## References

Connors, K., and Seifer, S.D., Editors. (2000). *Partnership Perspectives*. 2(1). San Francisco, CA: Community-Campus Partnerships for Health.

The Council of Independent Colleges. (2002). *Building partnerships with college campuses: Community Perspectives*. [Brochure]. Washington, DC: Author.