The Top 5 Reasons Public-Private Partnerships are Important for Grants Professionals

I have written about collaborations before, as they are an important topic and focus area in the grants world—as well as the public sector in general. Organizations develop and implement partnerships all the time, but what do they really mean? Let’s examine one such partnership in particular, the public-private partnership, more in depth and how this impacts not only grant seeking, but the nonprofit organization in its entirety.

1. The Rockefeller Effect (philanthropic partner)
When people think of public-private partnerships, the most common type of relationship is funding based. Generally, a corporate entity or corporate foundation, private foundation, or individual donor supports the work of a nonprofit through financial support. The funding comes in various forms and for various purposes, such as programs, general operating budget, specific projects, event sponsorships, scholarships, and a host of other causes. The goal of these relationships is to ensure that the organization serves as a good steward of the funding partner’s support. Here are some considerations to ensure a long-lasting relationship:

- Do you reach out to your funding partner for a non-funding request throughout the year?
- Do you provide updates on their support to ensure they are receiving a good return on their investment, which is in line with their strategic priorities?
- Are you providing them with the reports they request?
- Are you collaborating with multiple funders (and have some in the pipeline) to ensure sustainability?

2. The Build-a-Bear Effect (capacity builder)
A nonprofit’s board of directors provides access to trusted advisors for the organization and, ideally, the governance framework for the nonprofit to be successful. Ultimately, the Board should increase the capacity of the nonprofit simply by providing the support required to ensure the organization meets its goals. While board members have different backgrounds, many of them are part of the corporate world and have access to resources that can be leveraged, including connections, tools, and finances. Here are considerations to make the most of your board of directors:

- Are you holding your board members accountable?
- Do you have a threshold of support that each board member must provide to the organization?
- Is your board being trained on nonprofit governance and oversight?
- Do you have formal processes and procedures for how the board operates?

3. The Keeping it Real Effect (evaluator)
Evaluation planning, outcomes measurement, and logic models—these are all familiar terms, especially common in federal grant applications. External evaluators are often used to supporting research-based or outcomes-heavy projects that require additional support to ensure they are successful. In some applications, they are a required component, so it is important to ensure you have access to individuals (familiar with your mission) that can provide the evaluation support required. Here are considerations to ensure you have the best evaluation support:

- Do you have access to external evaluators?
Are you familiar with universities and institutes of higher learning, which have individuals able to support you in this capacity?
Are these individuals’ experts in addressing the outcomes of your target population?
Are there other collaborating nonprofit partners that can provide suggestions?

4. The Job Creator and Supporter Effect (program implementer)
In some situations, private partners might actually be part of the programmatic support that nonprofits provide to their community. They may be ingrained in the service offerings (e.g., financial literacy training) or serve as an extension of the nonprofit’s work (e.g., internship or employment opportunities). These partnerships are an important reminder of the importance of maintaining strong ties to the corporate and small business partners in the organization’s community. Here are considerations to make the most out of your local (potential) businesses:

- Do you participate in associations or groups that unite such partners, including chamber of commerce events?
- Do you review your local news to learn about any community work these businesses are currently doing or plan to do?
- Are you determining if your volunteer partners can become supporters at a different level?

5. The Sharing is Caring Effect (pro bono and volunteer partner)
Corporate volunteerism, pro bono, and in-kind support are wonderful ways in which to leverage the skills and expertise of private partners. There are multiple organizations around the country, including graduate schools (like NYU’s Capstone Program, my alma mater) and separate organizations like Compass, which provides strategic support to an organization by leveraging the skills of a group of individuals. This support is invaluable and often provides a necessary solution to a problem or issue that would otherwise have not been resolved due to lack of time and/or resources.
Here are considerations regarding pro bono and volunteer support:

- Are you familiar with pro bono consulting opportunities in your community?
- How do you leverage volunteer and in-kind support for other types of support your organization might need?
- How do you thank volunteers?

These partnerships are just a sampling of the myriad of ways that public-partnerships can thrive. How are you tapping into these resources to the advantage of your organization?