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## Partnering

For some years now those of us working in the arts and cultural sector have been getting the message that partnerships and collaborative activity are the way to get ahead and to get the money we need for survival. Funding bodies have often focused on partnering as a necessary condition for accessing financial support for an activity.

This has been a valuable exercise in many ways because it has made us take the blinkers off and have a good look around at the assets in our communities. It has encouraged the identification of partners outside our field of operation. It has found us knocking on the doors of businesses whose interests match our own and out looking for like-minded philanthropists.

While in the past a friendly sponsor may have been happy to hand over their contribution just to see your project succeed, more and more businesses and philanthropists are seeking real relationships. While this may seem a good move it is important to think through what 'real' partnering means. There are pros and cons to keep in mind

### Pros /Cons

Increase in financial resources/ Possible extra costs in servicing and maintaining the partnership

Potential for creating a better product/ Increased demand on your time

Building the capacity of your organisation by learning from the partner /Availability of skills in your organization to handle the people side of the partnership

Your organisation's legitimacy and recognition increased by the status of the partner/ Reputation risk if the partner's image and goals are not compatible

Improved networking opportunities/ Increase in paperwork

Diversification of audience /Servicing an increased database

### Partnerships That Work

There have been examples of groups choosing a partner simply to attract funding and then finding that the goals of the funding made them drift from their stated mission. Some projects can be done alone. Partnering needs to be strategic.

This means that a lot of planning needs to happen prior to any commitment being made in order to clarify the purpose of the project concerned and the roles of the partners involved.

A partnership that will work is one that has a clearly defined project:

- that is central to the work of the participating organisations
- that involves work to which each organisation can make obvious contributions, and
- that is undertaken by organisations with the capacity (staff, resources, competence) to contribute.<sup>1</sup>

It is also important that the underlying philosophy of the business matches that of your organisation and that your values are compatible. It has been interesting to see, for example, the number of companies that have withdrawn from partnering the tobacco industry once the hazardous nature of smoking was publicised.

There needs to be mutual respect and the capacity to maintain good communication between the two parties. Because a partnership is a relationship, it is helpful to arrange social connections to maintain the conversation around what you are doing together, as well as attending the formal meetings to sort out the hard headed business end of the deal.

### **Finding the best partnership model**

Before you can identify a potential business partner you need to identify what you can bring to the partnership and how that matches with what the partner can offer.

What can you offer?

- A reputation or creative environment that reflects well on the reputation of the business
- A product that can be shown in the business precinct
- A way of advertising the business name or product
- Creative personnel that can build communication skills with the staff of the business
- Access to social occasions that will be rewarding for managers and staff
- Discounts to performances or on your merchandise
- Access to your networks
- Improved morale of staff in partner organisation
- A project that attracts commitment from both parties

*“Let us celebrate that our humanity contains two strands that make us magic. A cognitive mind that shapes our culture and a genetic mind that ensures our survival. It is the latter mind that has been trained by the slow process of evolution to recognise that ‘waste of resource’ sometimes*

*evidenced by arts and its sponsorship is the best way to signal reputation.*” - Robin Wight. ‘The Peacock’s Tail and the Reputation Reflex. The Neuroscience of Arts Sponsorship’. The Arts & Business Lecture 2007:31

### **What can your business partner offer?**

- Shared values
- Volunteers or in-kind products, rental of spaces or services
- Financial support of a particular program or aspect of your operation
- Discounted products or services
- The resources to carry through on the partnership
- Employment experience or secondment to their staff
- Access to their networks
- Scholarships or awards
- Enhancement of your profile through the association with their name.

Given the different ways in which partnerships can work, it is important that the roles of each party are defined. This can happen through a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) or a Partnership Agreement.

### **Guide to Writing an Agreement**

Putting things in writing is a good way to make sure that the partnership will stay on track. There may be changes in management or key personnel in both your organisations.

The written agreement is a valuable tool in expressing the roles and expectations of both parties. This may be as simple as a letter or be a more formal contract or MOU.

The kinds of issues that will be covered in an agreement will be:

- Description of the aims, objectives and activities of your organisation
- The purpose of the partnership
- The criteria which will flag its success
- The timeframe for the partnership and reporting strategies
- The benefits accruing to each of the partners from the relationship
- What resources, cash and /or in-kind that each partner will be contributing
- The roles and responsibilities of each partner
- Protocols to be observed in contacting each party
- Wording of joint publicity

- How changes could be made in the relationship
- Behaviour that would lead to termination of the partnership
- Conflict resolution strategy
- How the partnership will be evaluated

Partnerships may involve naming rights and there will be a particular way in which this needs to be expressed in media releases and other publications. Make sure that this is clearly recorded in the agreement and kept before the staff involved in marketing and administration.

Keep your partner on your mailing list, list of invitees to functions and send them any material that comes across your desk that may be of interest to them to keep the communication lines open. Take every opportunity to celebrate achievement

### **Evaluating Success**

How do you know if the partnership is working? Evaluation can only take place if clear criteria have been identified when establishing the partnership against which the outcomes can be measured. These criteria may be different for each partner. For example the business partner may want an increase in business or in reputation from the alignment of their business with your project or event. You may want a better product, an increase in your network or audience development.

These are the criteria that you will have written into your partnership agreement. Your end of the bargain will be to make sure that you deliver on what you have promised. It is not possible to report on the success of the partnership unless there is documentation of the process and data gathering to demonstrate that the criteria have been met. You may need to:

- touch base regularly to report face-to-face on progress
- develop reporting mechanisms such as feedback sheets, a visitors book, ways of recording numbers or types of attendees, comparative chart of sales figures before and after the partnership
- supply photographic or video records
- After the project is completed:
  - Arrange a meeting with the partner to review the agreement
  - Present a written report as the basis for discussion
  - Discuss the areas that succeeded and those that needed more attention
  - Broker a renewal of the agreement with any additional elements that you have gleaned from the first experience.

***Arts Mid North Coast thanks Artslink Queensland for this information***