**Definition Of Partnerships**

- Partnerships are where people come together for joint problem solving, resource exchange, cooperation, coordination, coalition building, networking, and to take advantage of opportunities.

- They generally operate on a common ground of collective goals, use a variety of decision-making structures and processes, and exist to take care of shared tasks and certain joint actions.

- They can be informal or formal agreements, entail a commitment of resources, and may be temporary or permanent.

- Members generally give up some of their autonomy.

- They SHOULD establish a common identity and do productive work.

- They are the way we collectively organize to accomplish common shared visions (dreams).

**Partnership Process**

**WHY Partnerships?**

There must be a compelling reason to form a partnership – not a social club, gripe session, or free lunch, but a **valid purpose** centered around a **valid issue** that compels people to act on it. There are many generic reasons for forming partnerships, but often the reasons are very specific to the setting in which they are formed. Some generic reasons are:

- People need to pool resources and work together to achieve success. The process of synergy takes place.
- Help to bring a variety of perspectives to an effort
- To create new relationships
- To fulfill social, political, and economic agendas
- Public relations
- There are reductions in resource allocations.
- Partnerships are mandated by funders.

The important part is that the partnership must become an identifiable group, even if for one action. A **sense of community** must be created around the **why**.
WHO must be involved

• The first who to identify are the stakeholders. These are the persons who have a stake in what is to occur. A good exercise for this is to ask community members who are the formal groups that have a stake in what will happen, and who are the informal groups that have a stake in what is to happen. This creates a web of governance that helps identify the decision-making structure around partnership issues.

• The second set of “who's” are interested parties like federal and state agencies, regional organizations, absentee landlords and business owners or others who may not live there but have an interest in what happens. A community needs to determine how it wants these entities to participate, but they do need to be kept informed, especially if their decisions affect the community.

• The third set of “who's” are the people who are most impacted by the decisions being made.

These are the folks who are generally left out of the decision-making and partnering process until the very end. They are often marginalized and disenfranchised but often are those most affected. They should be brought in at the beginning, along with the first two who’s.

• The last “who” is the catalyst/facilitator. This person is perceived as neutral, has credibility and good group management skills. This person must describe the setting and environment in which the partnership is forming. He or she must demonstrate the impelling reason to be together, dangle the bait or be the magnet bringing people together. This person is the “who” that makes it all happen.

In review, there are three types of “who’s” that need to be involved and one who that brings them all together. All these “who's” must be involved from the beginning if the partnership is going to have a chance to work. One essential “who” that comes in late can sabotage the whole effort.

WHAT to do

You have brought all the “who’s” together. Now what will you do? The traditional approach has been the deficiency problem-solving model discussed earlier which often includes some of the following:

• Listing problems, looking for outside resources, and very little generally gets done.
• Each party focused on their own interest, pet project, pet peeve, or special thing to do
• People tend to say, “I am here to help you” when they really mean is “I’ve got a program to sell” or “A job to keep” or “An interest to protect” or “A pocket to fill” or “A vote to get” or “An empire to build.”
People tend to participate in their own self-interest in the deficiency approach. This can lead to conflicts and turf and resource allocation battles. The focus is not on what is in common, but how resources get divided up.

As discussed earlier, a different model, not particularly new but packaged differently and based upon basic human nature, is the capacity model. This is where we look to our dreams, what we have in common, and not just at the “if only” line. Another way to look at this is if you are filling potholes in a road going nowhere, or you want to see where you want the road to go. This is a developmental evolving process and not a prescription to a symptom. It is based upon where you really want to go and not someone’s particular agenda or pet peeves. This will get at the heart of the matter, look at eliminating root causes, focus on commonalities and be based on a community’s capacities, rather than reliance on outside resources. This will get at the what that really needs to be addressed.

**HOW to do it**

If the above process is done correctly, “the how” has already been established through the task forces and the overall group structure. This focuses on tasks and timelines and not so much on creating a formal structure. The emphasis is on doing, not organizing. The key is to grow the organizational structure as needed, not spend the first year on building a structure. The maxim of form follows function is critical in effective community partnerships. The how should look at how to do what needs to be done, not how to build an organizational structure. This can kill an effort faster than anything else when all energy is on form and not function. Let the how evolve, not be the focus of your efforts.

This leads to the different partnership approaches of directive or developmental.

- **The directive approach** is characterized by people serving the organization, one-on-one relationships, authoritative leadership, hierarchical decision-making, centralized structures, the focus on the organization, a view that you can change human nature, and a deficiency approach to problem-solving.

- **The developmental approach** is based on the principles that the organization serves the people, group relationships, facilitative leadership, consensus decision-making, team structure, a focus on purpose of organization, accepting human nature and focusing on changing the setting, and taking a capacity approach.

The excellent manual, *Partnerships for Community Development: Resources for Practitioners and Trainers* by Sally Habana–Hafner and the late Horace Reed, details several types and levels of partnerships.

They discuss three types of partnerships: networks, coordination, and collaboration. These are all points in a continuum of partnership levels based upon:

- Complexity of purpose
- Intensity of linkages and
- Formality of agreements.
This is a good way to look at the level and type of partnership you need to develop. Is the purpose simple or complex, how strong do the linkages need to be? And how formal do the agreements need to be? This will help guide you in the form or function priority for your partnership.

**Roles and Follow-up in the Partnership Process**

**the Initiator / Facilitator / Community Worker**

- Roles played
  - Before partnership sessions - A catalyst, resource person, thought provoker, educator, planner, public relations person, and investigator.
  - During partnership sessions - A facilitator, organizer, pusher, welcomer, greeter, and task master.
  - After partnership sessions – Follow-upper, nurturer, cheerleader, resource identifier / provider, taskmaster, re-energizer, and tracker.

- Follow-up with partners
  - Work with individual task groups
  - Stay away and wean whole group off of you as a leader
  - Refocus, re-energize - every six months to one year
  - Leadership process - develop new leadership by letting people DO
  - Increase community involvement
  - Public relations

**Underlying Principles of the Partnership Process**

- Based on human nature - can change the setting, but not basic human nature
- Empowering process - people “own it” - chance for all to participate
- Energizing process - employs concept of synergy
- Build upon commonalities - avoids conflicts, pet peeves
- Focus on doing - process leads to product - results
- People can DO - not just meet
- Focus on the purpose, not on the organization; it grows or dies naturally
- People are “partnered,” not organized and total community involvement involved in decisions
- Action leads to data and not vice versa
- Inch by inch and row by row - little victories
- Builds upon **people** and their growth / development
- Oral survey - meetings create information without written surveys