

Partnering for Impact

A Quick Guide For National Funder/Regional Association Partners

For national funders and regional associations who are considering working together on a common project or for a common purpose, the Annie E. Casey Foundation and the Association of Baltimore Area Grantmakers offer the following guide for consideration, based on their experiences with the Learning and Action Agenda Project.

DO

- **Consider national funders as a valuable partner for enhancing regional knowledge.** National funders often have a wealth of information and expertise around areas that affect communities within a specific region. Leveraging that national knowledge can improve local grantmaking.
- **Recognize the valuable relationships and trust that regional associations offer for expanding national reach.** Because of their relationships with individual foundations working at the state or community level, regional associations are key partners for helping national foundations share their expertise and improve their own effectiveness.
- **Understand the relationship(s).** Decide together whether this undertaking is one between equal partners, between grantor and grantee, or another kind of relationship altogether.
- **Say your piece.** Have frank discussions about money and expectations up front. These can sometimes be difficult topics to discuss at the beginning, but they'll only get more difficult as time goes on.
- **Share power.** Find ways to share power and leverage. While one partner may hold a bigger checkbook, another may hold the trust of other partners or audiences that are key to success.
- **Own your engagement.** Agree upon clear roles, types and levels of investment, and measures of accountability among all partners.
- **Know the benefits.** Clarify "what's in it for me" for all involved parties. While both foundation and RA staff can be highly motivated for a common good, it helps to see a payoff close to home.
- **Know where you're going.** Agree on desired outcomes and how you'll define success. Know where you're going, and you'll be more likely to get there.
- **Be flexible.** Be willing to adapt project structure, timelines, expectations, etc. as the project unfolds. There is more than one way to achieve a desired outcome, and part of the benefit of working in partnership is discovering and testing new methods and approaches.

- **Adapt your tools.** Individual partners may have specific tools they favor, but often those tools may require “re-tooling” to have more rewarding use for the group as a whole or to better address the challenges targeted by partners.
- **Appreciate the limitations of personnel time.** Unless your partnership plans to hire dedicated staff, everyone involved is adding the partnership’s work onto what is likely an already full plate. Be patient with yourself and with fellow partners and understand that other obligations will compete for attention.

DON'T

- **Confuse a coordinator with a middle-man.** While having one person or organization facilitate the project is a good idea, assuming their go-between services can take the place of direct communication between partners can be a mistake.
- **Be in a rush.** Partnerships between national foundations and regional associations are great for addressing deeply rooted social issues, but like every other approach to a gargantuan problem, getting to a point that feels successful will take time — most likely more time than anyone anticipates.
- **Expect a perfect outcome.** “Success” in partnerships often is not an end result so much as an ongoing experience. While reaching agreed-upon goals every time is extremely satisfying, more and better learning can often come from the process of working toward the goal — including learning why it may be unattainable.
- **Hang your hopes on a checkbook.** Although important, money is just one tool in a partnership’s arsenal. Money is never enough to solve a problem, nor is it the only way to meet a challenge.

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