

Top Ten Characteristics of Effective Nonprofit-Government Relationships

This training exercise was developed by Lydian Altman-Sauer, Margaret Henderson, and Gordon Whitaker as part of the Project to Strengthen Nonprofit-Government Relationships, a collaboration of the Institute of Government (University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill) and the NC Center *for* Nonprofits, with funding from the Jessie Ball duPont Fund.

Target Audience:

- ◆ Graduate students or public sector professionals who want to identify ways to maximize the effectiveness of their cross-sector working relationships.

The Purpose:

- ◆ Participants will identify the functional characteristics of both successful and challenging cross-sector working relationships.

Time Needed:

This exercise takes about 60-90 minutes, depending on the number of small groups that have to report out.

Materials Needed:

- ◆ Flip chart or blackboard.

1. Introduction:

- ◆ There is an ever-growing trend towards reliance on broad stakeholder groups, public/private partnerships, and multi-disciplinary or cross sector relationships to bring about change within communities.
- ◆ Effective cross-sector relationships are energizing and are assets to our communities.
- ◆ Ineffective cross-sector relationships can drain attention, resources, and energy away from the work that needs to be accomplished.

2. Characteristics of Successful Cross-Sector Relationships

Break the audience into small groups of 5-6 people. Keep people of similar professional backgrounds together. For example, local government staff will be in their own groups; nonprofit staff in their own groups. They are to take 15 minutes to discuss the following questions, and brainstorm a list of the factors they identify.

Think about the best relationships you have with government/nonprofits [the opposite sector]. Why are the relationships successful? What practices, characteristics, philosophies, or factors are present?

Allow each group to report an identified characteristic to the entire audience. The facilitator compiles a Top Ten List on the flip chart as the groups are reporting out. Keep going around the groups until they have listed all of the factors they identified. Post the flip chart pages so that everyone can refer to them later on.

If there are more than ten characteristics, allow the group time to discuss which characteristics are the most important to the success of the cross-sector relationships.

3. Characteristics of Unsuccessful Cross-Sector Relationships

Repeat the small group process with this complementary question.

Think about the worst relationships you have with government/nonprofits [the opposite sector]. Why is the relationship frustrating? What practices, characteristics, philosophies, or factors are present?

Repeat the process of having the small groups report out to the whole audience.

4. Comparison of the Two Lists

How do the two lists compare? Is it as simple as one list being opposite or complementary to the other?

Does anything on either list present a particular challenge or require a significant shift in practice, training, resources, or philosophy?

If the audience only includes people from nonprofits or people from government, ask if they believe the lists generated by the absent sector would be similar or different. In what ways?

5. Handouts

On this website are three one-page handouts that might be useful to distribute to this audience.

- ◆ What Nonprofits Can Do to Build Effective Working Relationships
- ◆ What Local Government Can Do to Build Effective Working Relationships
- ◆ What Nonprofits and Government Can Do Together to Build Effective Working Relationships