

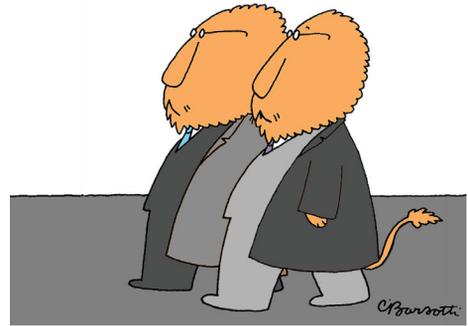
McGowan News

May 3, 2022

The Power of Partnership

Partnerships are needed today more than ever. How can we initiate them?

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"So I said, I'll have my people call your people, then he ate my people."

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The Art of Partnering

What makes a nonprofit grow like a tech startup? The right partners—and more.

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How to Be Part of Something Bigger

Community foundations often lead projects involving several nonprofits. Here's what they look for.

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\$1.28 Million in Grants

Support for new mothers in Chicago, literacy in Kansas City, medical and dental services for the uninsured in Northeastern Pennsylvania.

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The Power of Partnership

*A letter from Executive Director
Diana Spencer*

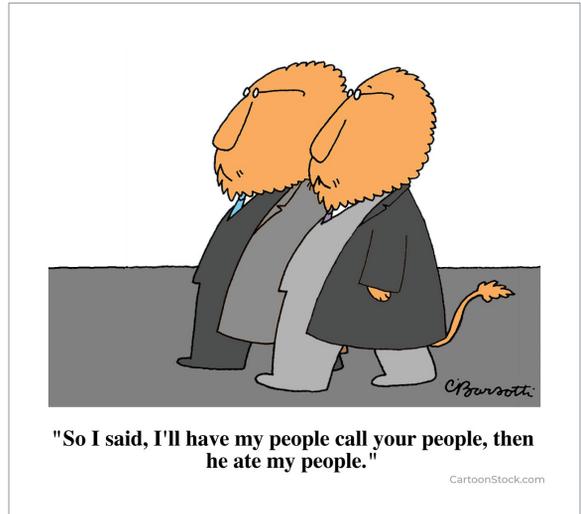
Dear Friends,

In a world where the challenges of poverty have both multiplied and become more difficult, there is power in partnership. When we combine resources, we unlock huge potential to solve some of society's most pressing issues.

From nonprofits merging to serve more individuals, reduce costs, and streamline processes, to community foundation partners serving as conveners and catalysts of important initiatives, partnerships come in many flavors. They are needed today more than ever.

In this newsletter you will learn about [Kansas City-based Vibrant Health's journey](#) as they acquire another healthcare clinic and continue to grow with partnerships. You will hear [community foundation leaders share their insights](#) on establishing partnerships. These endeavors take time, patience, input from all constituents, trust, courage, and most of all, dedication to the project mission, or the *North Star*.

At the McGowan Fund, we carefully consider outcomes and sustainability for end beneficiaries, as well as sustainability for our nonprofit partners. We know that organizations relying solely on philanthropy for funding are at risk, particularly in times of market downturns and lower investment returns. Relying exclusively on government funding is also a risk. Budgets are strained, and the Department of Health and Human Services is often the first to see these cuts.



Government and philanthropy often have the same goals, targeting the same constituents. What becomes the larger question is one of partnership initiation. How do we engage elected officials in more partnerships? How do we break out of silos?

Some philanthropies have long supported pilot programs that provide government agencies with proof of successful interventions. The goal is to help successful programs find a place in state budgets so that they can be sustained for the long term. This model is a good example of how to increase public and private partnerships. Federal funding dollars far exceed the cumulative total of philanthropic dollars year over year. Philanthropy and nonprofits have the ability to nimbly design and test solutions. It seems reasonable that philanthropy and elected officials should form stronger partnerships in the shared quest to solve the many challenges in our communities.

As we all strive to improve conditions for millions of Americans and beyond, I believe that the power of public/private partnerships must prevail. The promise of a brighter future is an outcome that we can all embrace as we work together. As Vibrant Health and the community foundations show us, good partnerships help us become part of something bigger. [hlf](#)

Sincerely,

Diana Spencer
Executive Director

The Art of Partnering

What makes a nonprofit grow like a tech startup? The right partners—and more.



Turner House, once a small clinic in Wyandotte County, Kansas, knows a bit about growth. In 2017, the clinic served 5,000 patients in Wyandotte County, Kansas. Five years later, the number of its patients has quadrupled. The locations have too. Its staff has increased nearly sevenfold. There's a name change, to Vibrant Health. An important designation as a Federally Qualified Health Center (FQHC), which enables the organization to receive reimbursement through Medicaid and Medicare. Another plus is the increased capacity to provide holistic care, including behavioral health, community education, and helping arrange transportation for patients.

The fuel behind this Silicon Valley-style growth? Partnerships. Vibrant's partners include the University of Kansas Health System and Children's Mercy Hospital. Community partners include the Wyandotte County Public Health Department. Making and codifying these connections is not easy. Along the way, Vibrant staff learned some straightforward lessons that are applicable for other nonprofits searching for increased capacity and fiscal strength.

For Vibrant's President and CEO Patrick Sallee, good partnerships start with aligned missions and a strong desire to help each other succeed. Sallee emphasizes the need to create unique relationships with each partner. "I am not interested in being on a long list of partners with an off-the-shelf contractual relationship," he says. "A part of what makes it work for us is that organizations and people understand that this is different. We have a special relationship."

Before inking agreements, Vibrant executives reach out to multiple people at different levels within each potential partner organization. "Our partnership is at risk if it depends on just one person," says Sallee. "There is security in partnerships when you know a dozen people and you talk to them every couple of months. Similarly, we have several people here who are also engaged with each of those partners."

The effort in developing relationships also has the benefit of improving operational efficiency. Vibrant's Chief Administrative Officer Brandi Finocchario says that it is critical to ask questions and to map out detailed points of contact at the start of partnerships to minimize frustration when something goes wrong. "Relationships are everything," she says.

Frequent communication is a key element of any successful partnership. Vibrant's FQHC status and its size put it on a different footing than its larger clinical partners. "We do things differently and can make changes quickly. We make sure that our partners are aware," says Chief Nursing Officer Jessica Nichols. "Maintaining communication is really beneficial."

The focus on relationships and communication may be most intense at the beginning of new partnerships. After the most recent merger with Children's Mercy, Vibrant closed the clinic for a week to give staff time to familiarize themselves with each other before reopening under the new brand. "It gave everyone a chance to step back and not feel that they were just being thrown into it. It helped a lot," says Finocchario.

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All-hand meetings are a staple at Vibrant. On the second Tuesday of every month, all Vibrant clinics close from noon to 5 pm to give staff an opportunity to hear news and ask questions. “Maintaining inward focus along with the growth is incredibly important,” says Nichols.

Within the community, Vibrant is focused on establishing itself as a partner that can provide reliable, flexible support. One example: When

the Wyandotte County Public Health Department needed a partner to lead conversations on healthcare access, Vibrant hired a staffer for the project. “We put in the investment before even asking for funding. To build good relationships, you give before you take,” says Sallee.

Would he do anything differently the next time that a partnership is on the table? “I would start exactly the same way by looking at the mission and whether we have shared visions,” says Sallee. “It starts with the vision.” 

How to Be Part of Something Bigger

Community foundations often lead projects involving several nonprofits. Here's what they look for.



Every partnership is unique but here's one thing that they all share: the belief that working together will jump-start success. Partnering, at its core, is a leap of faith.

Before taking that leap, however, experienced partners look at many factors. Community foundations, who partner with multiple nonprofits, start by looking for shared visions and ground knowledge. But there's much more.

Passion for one.

“Sometimes, we start by identifying where there is a track record of success and the ability to grow. That's one piece,” says Scranton Area Community Foundation President and CEO Laura Ducceschi. “And then, sometimes, you get an executive director or team members that are very passionate and want to embark upon a certain area and come to us. That's the other piece.”

Expertise is another.

“It's comfortable to go back to partners. But it doesn't mean that we leave out new partners they may have the skills, knowledge, or contacts that will make a specific project work,” says Rochester Area Community Foundation President and CEO

Jennifer Leonard. “I don't think that we have ever done a project with the same exact list of partners as at any other time.”

Including the voices of those directly impacted is important too.

When the Rochester Area Community Foundation was asked to establish the Muriel H. Marshall Fund for the Aging in Genesee County, the donor wanted to enhance the quality of life for seniors. Her vision included help with transportation, home delivery of library books, senior outings, even handyman services. Genesee, a rural county, had few traditional nonprofits. The foundation partnered with the county and local agencies and created a committee comprised of local seniors who had been engaged in civic life to oversee decisions. Says Leonard, “The people closest to the pain were sitting right there on the committee.”

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Having a bold vision is another factor.

In Kansas City, local schools had explored creating pre-K classrooms with state funding but were constrained by existing facilities and staff. Partnering with early childhood providers and leveraging shared resources was a potential answer, but the startup costs were high. “Philanthropy was able to step in and cover the initial costs,” says Greater Kansas City Community Foundation Senior Philanthropic Advisor Whitney Hosty, describing how the foundation worked with donors and partners to quickly create a fund to collect and disburse contributions. “The first classrooms started about six to eight months after these conversations started.”

Open communication is important.

The Scranton Area Community Foundation’s Women In Philanthropy initiative partnered with United Neighborhood Centers (UNC) to launch a program that provided financial literacy and matched a portion of the savings for women with limited financial means. After implementing the program for several months, UNC identified three issues. The specified income levels were so low that they were excluding women who would have benefitted from participating. Some women could not attend all the sessions. Others, who had completed the program, wanted to re-enroll with new savings goals.

The foundation listened. “The grantees are on frontlines. We need to be truly listening to change and pivot in midcourse, if necessary,” says Ducceschi, adding that organizations should also share pain points such as needing funding to hire a resource or implement a plan so that foundations can help. “I think if you have good lines of communication throughout the process, you eliminate a lot of the challenges.”

There’s one more thing. “Always share the credit,” says Leonard.

Because the next time a partner wants to take that leap of faith, that generosity in sharing credit might be just a signal that they are looking for. 

Read more about mergers and partnering:

A merger is not an escape plan, according to [Stanford Social Innovation Review](#). The Stanford folks expected to see numerous mergers in 2021, and this guide is a signal they’re still expecting.

A merger may not be an escape plan, but there are some indicators you might be a candidate, including the departure of a CEO or financial issues. MissionBox offers a [quick rundown](#).

Luckily there are many ways to merge, partner, collaborate, share staff, and share clients. [The Collaboration Hub](#) specializes in showcasing collaborative models and experiences.

