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Strengthen Your Nonprofit with a Strategic Partnership

In their efforts to boost efficiency, nonprofits can have a hard time turning up strategies that don't roll up the budget. What many don't realize is that they don't have to go at it alone. Your nonprofit can address its pain points and enhance its operations by joining forces with another organization in a nonprofit partnership.

Strategic nonprofit partnerships can offer a slew of attractive benefits. From improving outreach efforts to enhancing programs and services, there are many ways that an alliance can help your organization improve its efficacy, impact, and sustainability.

The first step to planning a partnership is to clearly define what you want to get out of it. To help you identify and clarify your organization's needs, here are a few potential ways that a smart nonprofit partnership can be beneficial.

1. Increase Brand Exposure

One of the main advantages a nonprofit partnership can offer is increased visibility for your brand. Natural cross-promotion allows you to easily reach another organization's network. Depending on the nature of the partnership, a partner can feature you on their website, social channels, or regular communications to their community.

Think about whether or not there's a specific audience you want to target. Do you want to reach a certain age group? Or do you want to reach a new audience that doesn't necessarily fit into your common donor

personas? Your answers can help narrow down potential partners whose audience includes the people you want to reach. Keep in mind that you can consider approaching for-profit companies too.

2. Increase the Range of Services You Offer

If you're looking to advance your mission and enhance your programmatic impact (without funding a whole new program), a strategic partnership can give you access to tools, resources, and services you need.

One way to expand your range of services is to launch a joint initiative with another organization that has a similar mission. With the right partnership, you can supplement each other's services to broaden your offerings. For instance, this relationship can work like a "referral" program, where each party directs constituents to the other for further support. For example, let's say you're a nonprofit that provides housing for underserved communities. Your programs don't provide access to computers, but you might partner with an organization that does. You can then refer your constituents to your partner, who can do the same for you. By teaming up, both organizations can expand the services they provide without hiking up their budget. A relationship like this also allows both parties to still operate independently. Rather than consolidating programs, you would simply share information and coordinate your efforts.

3. Save Administrative Costs

If you're explicitly looking to cut administrative costs, the partnership type you select depends on your financial needs. Nonprofits that are tightly strapped financially sometimes consider integrating with another organization. One such partnership option is a strategic restructure or merger, in which separate organizations completely integrate administrative, program, and governance functions, allowing them to leverage resources, expand programmatic abilities, and become more cost-effective. Note that this typically changes an organization's structure and control.

If you're looking to cut down infrastructure or administrative costs without sacrificing autonomy, there are other options. You might approach local organizations (either nonprofit or for-profit) that can share expenses to rent facilities or buy office equipment and supplies. Sharing workspaces can be a great way to save money, and it can encourage collaboration and increase your visibility. This can also be a great idea if two partners take turns using the facilities. If one organization occupies the space in the morning, then the other could use it in the evenings.

Sharing spaces can often lead to sharing staff or departments as well. If you're in the same space, you can share an IT department or train staff together. You might even collaborate to build a preferred vendor program.

4. Increase Brand Credibility

A strategic nonprofit partnership can also elevate your organization's credibility and support. By partnering with a well-known and trusted organization, you can increase your visibility and improve the public's perception of your own brand. This can help you build trust and attract support.

A great example of this type of partnership is the one between Vs. Cancer and the V Foundation for Cancer Research. Both organizations' missions align: Vs. Cancer is a nonprofit that empowers athletes to fund childhood cancer research and local pediatric oncology programs, and the V Foundation funds cancer

research at prominent cancer centers across the nation. What makes this partnership particularly strategic is the way the V Foundation's reputation validates Vs. Cancer's efforts. Because the foundation is widely known within the athletic community, people who hear about Vs. Cancer for the first time through the partnership are more likely to trust the nonprofit.

Likewise, an incompatible partnership can damage your reputation, so choose your partner wisely. Make sure the prospective partner aligns with your organization's mission and core values.

These are just a few needs that a nonprofit partnership can help fulfill. Before you move forward, it's important to define what you want it to accomplish and keep your goals front and center as you explore the possibilities. Doing this prior to settling on a partner will help you choose the right partner and develop an alliance that will deliver the best results.