



Guide for Developing Partnerships

The following tips were offered by DRK-12 awardees.

Building Partnerships

1. **Outreach and Site Selection:** Cast a wide net of outreach but choose partners and sites carefully, looking for common goals and sustainability. Understand local structures and leverage them to facilitate introductions and partnerships.
2. **Be Flexible with Participation:** Anticipate and creatively address scenarios where there is either too much interest or a need to involve partners at different stages of the project.
3. **Vertical Relationship Building:** Develop relationships within a school district at multiple levels to minimize the impact of turnover and enhance sustainability.
4. **Involve Key Stakeholders:** Include district advisors or project-related personnel in leadership roles and the project agenda to foster ownership and commitment.
5. **Sustainability and Mutual Benefits:** Work toward creating sustainable partnerships with clear, shared values like equity. Involve partners in meaningful ways throughout the project, including writing, publishing, and presenting outcomes.
6. **Early Relationship Building:** Before writing proposals, build relationships with potential partners to understand their needs and ensure the project aligns with their goals.
7. **Inclusive Design Process:** Engage teachers and other stakeholders in the grant-design process, offering them a voice in shaping the project.
8. **Community Agreements:** Craft agreements that reflect the community's values and norms, ensuring a safe and respectful environment for collaboration.

Acknowledging Context and History

1. **Contextual Sensitivity:** Understand that partnerships cannot be acontextual or ahistorical. The local context, history, and dynamics of power and race significantly influence the partnership's structure and function.
2. **Intentional Disruption of Inequitable Patterns:** Recognize that partnerships often disproportionately benefit institutions and individuals within majority white spaces. Actively work to disrupt these patterns by centering the needs, voices, and benefits on historically marginalized communities.
3. **Reframing Partnerships:** Shift the narrative from viewing partnerships as benevolent acts of more dominant groups working with more marginalized groups to partnerships fostering equitable and mutually beneficial relationships.

Nurturing Relationships and the Work

1. **Establish Personal Connections:** Make efforts to connect on a personal level, acknowledging the humanity and individuality of each partner.
2. **Honesty and Transparency:** Be open and honest in communications. Acknowledge the limitations and challenges openly to build trust.
3. **Consistent Engagement:** Show up for your partners and the community. Be present in meetings, discussions, and when support is needed.
4. **Regular Check-Ins and Growth:** Schedule regular check-ins to assess the partnership's progress and take time to grow and nurture these relationships.
5. **Pause and Reflect:** Practice the power of the pause to reflect on the partnership's direction and ensure alignment with shared goals.
6. **Incentivize Lived Experiences:** Offer incentives to individuals sharing their lived experiences to acknowledge the value and importance of their contributions.
7. **Mitigate Burdens:** Consider the impact on teachers' personal time and work to reduce burdens by providing substitutes, extra stipends, and planning time.
8. **Prepare for Uncomfortable Conversations:** Be ready to engage in difficult discussions as they are essential for growth and understanding in partnerships.

Adapting to Change

1. **Flexibility and Adaptability:** Acknowledge that contexts and priorities will evolve. Be prepared to learn and adapt flexibly to sustain the value of the work in changing circumstances.
2. **Anticipate Leadership Changes:** Recognize that changes in school district leadership and priorities are common. Adapt partnership goals and activities to align with new directions as needed.
3. **Respond to Emergent Needs:** Be nimble in redefining project goals and refocusing activities based on the changing needs of teachers, leaders, and communities, as highlighted by situations like the pandemic.
4. **Human Complexity and Diversity:** Remember that partnerships involve complex human beings with diverse needs, pressures, priorities, and timelines. Approach each partnership with empathy and a willingness to understand and accommodate these differences.