



INTRODUCTION:

It's extremely inefficient to work in a vacuum. Everyone needs strategic and diverse partnerships to succeed. It's an important, long-term strategy and when executed well, has the potential to yield significant impact for your organization. However, stakeholder engagement must be done carefully, thoughtfully and authentically. It can be messy, hairsplitting work and requires lots of patience, trust and transparent communication. This document is a primer to help you navigate authentic engagement with diverse sectors.

HOW TO ENGAGE DIVERSE GROUPS:

Do Your Homework: Before engaging with any group, research the community and/or partner of interest. It's like a job interview, most candidates conduct their research before going into an exchange.

- Read the potential partner's annual reports.
- Review their websites and social media.
- Look for any historical or cultural challenges this group may have faced or still faces.
- Understand the capacity of the organization. Is it a formal establishment or a group of volunteers? Is there paid leadership? Does it have a board? Knowing the capacity of a potential partner can help with managing expectations.

After conducting extensive research to determine relevant and viable stakeholders, it's time to initiate a conversation. If your network cannot make an introduction, then move forward with the outreach on your own. Be prepared for slow responses and if multiple attempts yield nothing, move on to the next.

Actively Listen: Ask potential partners for what they might need. What are their biggest priorities or concerns? If there is reluctance in the response, consider re-framing your question(s) as there might be cultural nuances at play. Some individuals may not provide direct answers, particularly if it has the potential to expose any vulnerabilities.

Be Present in the Sector & Invest in Them: Build relationships by showing up at events, community forums or volunteer to help lift sector awareness. Be careful to not be intrusive! Make your presence a subtle and productive one, this will score very well with building an authentic relationship with diverse partners.

- Staff registration tables, participate in event cleanup/set-up or ask the potential partner what they need and volunteer to help in that capacity.
- Buy tickets to annual galas or fundraising events without asking for a speaking role or one that allows for high visibility. Just show up as a supportive partner.
- When asking leaders to participate in committees or inviting them to serve as a keynote, sit on a panel or provide expertise, compensate them in some way.

Utilize Influence for Good: If you are the leader of a larger, more “affluent” organization, help make connections for sector leaders to important funders, board members, donors or other well-heeled groups. This will help expand your partners’ spheres of influence and go a long way in demonstrating altruism.

Amplify Messaging: Every partner needs help with getting their messages and perspectives out to a broader audience. Therefore, promoting their work through newsletters, social media and blog posts, co-authoring op-eds, media stories and publicly giving credit to partners is invaluable in creating trustworthy, meaningful engagement.

Knowing How and When to Stand Back: Just as actions are important, so is knowing how and when to step back. Recognize that there are going to be moments when partners need more space to be vocal about their missions without interruption. Allow partners this grace without judgement.

Co-Fundraise or Defer Funding Opportunities to Diverse Groups: This might seem or feel counterintuitive, but this generous approach to co-fundraising can be a mutually beneficial strategy, where appropriate. Opportunities for collaborative fundraising could yield more money, leverage, influence and impact.

CONCLUSION

Building authentic partnerships in diverse sectors takes an active and consistent presence. Be sure to keep communication and “motives” transparent. Mistakes will be made since this is “people” centered work and it can be messy at times. However, in the long-term, having mutually beneficial and authentic relationships with groups from diverse sectors will make for far reaching impact.

For more information about how to develop a successful framework for building successful Communities of Practice, partnerships, strategic planning, and board development, contact Onyx Strategies Group at info@onyxstrategiesgroup.com.

