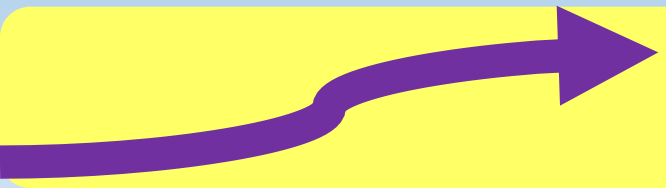




Pathways for Addressing Social Needs: Advocacy and Building Partnerships

Developing the Collaborative Relationships to
Address Community Needs





Overview

- Building strong community partnerships can be a key factor in developing successful programs to address social needs.
- Many faith organizations running community programs work together with other religious institutions to create multifaith models of outreach.
- Building strong partnerships requires aligning mission, vision, values, and goals with organizations in the community committed to serving social needs.
- Working with government partners can be beneficial in serving social needs from both the regulatory and financial standpoint.

Steps to Build Community Partnerships



- Identify the community to be served and what potential partners also serve the area.
 - Mapping out the existing resources in your community will highlight where there may be existing skills, talents, and inroads to leverage. It helps to understand the characteristics of your community and the links that already exist or can be built between different parts of the community, associations, and agencies.¹
- Identify potential community partners based on similar missions and values.
- Discuss a shared vision for the community and agree on common goals for serving unmet social needs.
- Utilize the relationships the partners have in the community to invite other stakeholders to be part of the project.



Steps to Build Community Partnerships

- Identify the resources and skills that each partner brings to the table.
 - Financial Support
 - Staff Expertise
 - Space/Facilities
 - Leadership
 - Community Connections
 - Other Resources
- Establish clear metrics to measure outcomes/progress.
- Maintain ongoing communication with the program partners to keep them updated on any issues and progress made in reaching the goals.
- Keep the partners engaged throughout the duration of the project.



Community Partner Worksheet

This tool can be helpful in identifying community partners and their role with the program/project.

Organization/Entity/ Individual Name	Key Area of Focus or Expertise	Role(s) on the Program/Project	Resources/Assets They Provide to the Project	Key Contact Name, Phone, Email



Building Multifaith Partnerships

- Many faith-led projects addressing social needs in the community involve partnerships between different faith groups.
- Key steps in building multifaith partnerships include:
 - Identify community issues/needs that are of common concern to different faith groups.
 - Begin to dialogue with the different faith partners to assess the comfort level of working together on a community project.
 - Be open to understanding and respectful of each faith partners' background and religious traditions.
 - Faith groups have unique traditions and values. Honor those differences while working toward a common mission. Ensure that the sessions are inclusive and respectful of religious practices and traditions, such as scheduling around prayer times and providing appropriate dietary options.²



Building Multifaith Partnerships

- Key steps in building multifaith partnership (continued):
 - Identify champions from the faith group/institution to be a liaison to the program/project.
 - Discuss what each faith partner is willing to contribute to the program/project.
 - Work within the faith institutions' communication channels to engage the members/congregants from their sites (i.e. newsletter, bulletin, sermons, etc.).
 - Use the partnership to learn about each faith groups' beliefs, backgrounds, and religious traditions.
 - Provide faith groups with the opportunity to decline partnering on certain projects that may conflict with their beliefs or religious doctrine.
 - When establishing project timelines/deadlines, be sensitive to the other priorities or resources of the faith partners (i.e. some faith groups are small with limited staffing).
 - Keep the faith partners engaged in the program/project and maintain open and ongoing communication.



Advocacy in Addressing Social Needs

- Advocacy can be an important part of garnering community support for the program/project addressing a social need.
 - Advocacy can be defined as the act of supporting a cause or proposal through various actions designed to inform and influence others. It encompasses a wide range of activities, from raising public awareness to lobbying government officials to make policy changes.³
- Key steps in doing successful advocacy.
 - Develop effective messaging for your program/project.
 - Be clear and concise with your message, back up the messaging with numbers/facts, and share personal stories of those impacted by the issue.
 - Build relationships with government representatives and key community stakeholders.
 - Build a coalition of key stakeholders in the community interested in the issue or need you are focusing on.
 - Continue to build your coalition of supporters because there is strength in numbers when it comes to addressing a community issue or need.



Develop an Elevator Speech About the Project

- An elevator pitch or speech provides a brief introduction about your program/project, it's main purpose or problem/issue it is addressing, and the key reason why this matters or is important.
 - It is a teaser that lasts 60 seconds or less to begin a conversation and make meaningful connections with confidence when meeting new people.⁴
- Key steps in developing a good elevator speech/pitch:
 - Open the conversation with a warm introduction or greeting.
 - Clearly identify yourself, the organization, the program you are highlighting, and your role/affiliation with the program.
 - Provide a brief and clear explanation of what the program/project does.
 - Describe the key issue/need the program is addressing and why it is important.
 - Include numbers/data to make your point and share a compelling story about the program to show the impact it is having.
 - Discuss next steps or a call to action with the audience you are speaking to.



Advocating With Government Officials

- Although many argue for the separation of church and state in the U.S., government officials (including both elected representatives and career staff) can be a good ally for the organization.
 - Government, business and nonprofit collaboration helps provide essential services that strengthen communities and delivers vital services to millions of people across the country.⁵
- Key considerations in building relationships with government officials.
 - Know who the key elected officials are representing your geographic area.
 - Build relationships with the staff members of the elected official's office.
 - Be aware of what issues/topics are of primary concern to your elected representatives.



Advocating With Government Officials

- Key considerations in building relationships with government officials (continued):
 - Keep elected officials' offices updated about the program/project.
 - Invite staff and the elected representative to program events.
 - Respond quickly to any question from the government official.
 - Discuss opportunities for collaboration with the program/project including assistance with regulations or opportunities to secure future governmental funding.
 - Be clear with the government official on how the program provides services to the community that is different from the faith-based organization's proselytizing role.
 - Offer opportunities for the government official to meet with the clients served by the program to hear their stories first hand.
 - Build an ongoing relationship with the official to develop an advocate for your project.



Benefits of Community and Multifaith Partnerships

- Community partnerships help to bring different ideas and perspectives on how to address needs in the community.
- The partnerships can help to expand the program's reach and capacity.
- Working with other faith-based partners helps to increase learning, awareness, and tolerance for other beliefs and faith traditions.
- Pooling of resources among partners can help sustain and grow the program.
- Community programs can help to engage the members of the partnering faith groups in working to address social issues and needs.
- When you build and maintain a good partnership, the work is made not only easier but also more transparent, representative of community interests and needs, effective, and impactful.⁶
- Good community partnerships result in strong advocates for the program.



Conclusion

- Creating strong community partnerships with both sectarian and nonsectarian organizations can help build effective programs to address social needs in communities.
- There are processes that can help in developing successful partnerships with community, religious, and government organizations.
- In addition to addressing unmet needs in the community, multifaith partnerships may also provide learning opportunities to understand and respect different faith traditions.
- Advocacy is an important part of an organization's work because it builds community awareness and support for the pressing social needs focused on by the program/project.



Online Resources

- **LENA Partnership Toolkit**

- Offers tools and information to help organizations develop community partnerships.
<https://www.lena.org/resources/guides/>

- **Elected Officials in U.S. Congress**

- Offers a searchable database of the elected officials in the U.S. Congress.
<https://www.congress.gov/members>

- **Harvard Catalyst**

- Offers resources on writing good elevator pitches for your program.
<https://catalyst.harvard.edu/writing-communication-center/>

- **Urban Institute**

- Offers tools and resources for building community partnerships
https://www.urban.org/search?site_search=community+partnerships&sort_by=relevance

Reference Notes

¹LENA, “*Guide to Building and Maintaining Community Partnerships*,” 2019, https://www.lena.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/LENA_Partnership_Toolkit_20211110.pdf (accessed February 3, 2026).

²Rev. Johnny Riley, Jr., “*Strengthening Our Communities: The Power of Faith-Based Partnerships*,” South Southwest PTTC, 2026, <https://pttcnetwork.org/strengthening-our-communities-the-power-of-faith-based-partnerships/> (accessed February 4, 2026).

³Charity Charge, “*What is Advocacy? Definition and Examples*,” November 19, 2024, <https://www.charitycharge.com/nonprofit-resources/what-is-advocacy/> (accessed January 30, 2026).

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⁵Kendra Davenport, “*Why Corporate and Government Collaboration With Nonprofits Is Critical for America*,” Forbes Nonprofit Council, May 22, 2025, <https://www.forbes.com/councils/forbesnonprofitcouncil/2025/05/22/why-corporate-and-government-collaboration-with-nonprofits-is-critical-for-america/> (accessed January 27, 2026).

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