CHAPTER 3

Partnership
Building the foundations of successful collaboration

Though the concept is nothing new, the urgency for effective collaboration across sectors and borders is building behind a weak global economy and scarce resources for businesses, governments, and nonprofits alike. The result has been a rash of mergers between NGOs, and some hastily arranged partnerships designed to share resources and reduce costs. But as always, successful partnerships require careful planning, common goals, and rigorous management. And Jam participants had plenty of advice for each major constituent of the services sector.
Nonprofits

The economic stress of recent years has forced nonprofits to reconsider the way they engage the private sector, government, and each other.

It has activated certain survival instincts. And it has led some nonprofits to make bad partnering decisions, or fail to complete the necessary foundational work to ensure collaborative success.

"Too many collaborations operate at the least common denominator—we'll put several logos on the materials, we'll cross endorse on our websites," said Robin Willner, vice president of Global Community Initiatives at IBM. "But the hard work is to identify the common interests, grapple with those important areas of debate or even disagreement, and find meaningful roles and contributions for each party. In a real collaboration, the partners have created an innovation that was not possible before. That's the power of collaboration—new ideas, new capacity, new results."

Indeed many Jam participants agreed that successful collaboration requires hard work, much of which is completed before any papers are signed between partners. The process of vetting potential partnerships, aligning goals, defining responsibilities, and managing relationships has not traditionally been one of strength for nonprofits. And a number of Jam participants called for more structure and discipline in those

"We live at a time when resources are limited and needs are great. Now more than ever it's important for nonprofits and the people who work with them, both as professionals and as volunteers, to know and to have thoughtful means to demonstrate that their work is making a positive difference."

Diana Aviv
President and CEO of Independent Sector
While Greater Philadelphia corporations have long been committed to giving back, there is no formal, collective process through which they can increase their service impact on the city. In partnership with the United Way of Southeastern Pennsylvania, we are supporting the development of a Greater Philadelphia Corporate Volunteer Council. This new council will increase networking and sharing of best volunteer engagement practices, promote better matching of corporate expertise with community needs and ultimately support a shared approach to addressing some of our city’s most pressing challenges.”

Philadelphia Mayor Michael A. Nutter

areas, including hiring a paid staff member with expertise in collaborative processes.

Merging, or resource pooling, was also seen as a viable option to relieve the financial pressure. One Jam participant, who had recently merged his nonprofit with two others in adjacent fields, had this to say: “Grants have been easier to come by because government agencies see the benefits of consolidated expenses.”

Regardless of the strategy, however, without an honest and direct approach to the relationship, collaborations will not succeed. “Competing interests have to be acknowledged and addressed head-on, and then leveraged for the innovative solutions their resolution brings,” said Barbara Salop, an independent consultant. “Nonprofits have a common goal: to seek funding. This sometimes puts NFPs that would like to collaborate into competition, especially if they are addressing similar causes. Making nice, and pretending the conflict will go away just based on good intentions, will not make conflict go away. But this creative tension is an opportunity to make something new and compelling.”

**Partnership and Collaboration**
The following are survey results from Quick Polls conducted during the Service Jam.

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<th>The most important factors in scaling social innovation</th>
<th>The extent to which competition is unproductive in partnerships</th>
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<tr>
<td>45% Develop alliances/partnerships</td>
<td>32% Often unproductive</td>
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<tr>
<td>24% Strong Leadership</td>
<td>24% Usually unproductive</td>
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<tr>
<td>20% Develop grassroots network</td>
<td>25% Often productive</td>
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<tr>
<td>10% Standardize processes</td>
<td>19% Usually productive</td>
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<td>2% Hire more employees</td>
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56% of Jam Participants view competition among partners as unproductive.
Private Sector

Just as nonprofits need to conduct the hard work of vetting and structuring successful partnerships, so too must the private sector do its part.

Nonprofits often complain of publicity-driven participation from the private sector or misdirected donations of time and money. Often these well-intentioned offers end up compromising or distracting from a nonprofit's strategic mission. Many Jam participants blamed these misalignments on poor understanding of the mutual benefits of these associations.

"Businesses tend to think that they have more to teach to nonprofits than vice versa, but that is not true," said Patricia Menezes, an executive in IBM Corporate Citizenship & Corporate Affairs in Latin America. "Nonprofit institutions have interesting ways to solve problems. Some partnerships help global companies to think about local problems that really matter and impact their operations, even if they are not aware of the impact or future impact.

One example of this is a program run by the 4-H organization in the United States. Partnering with the Toyota USA Foundation and the Coca-Cola Foundation, 4-H launched a program called 4-H.O, a national science experiment designed to raise awareness of water quality and environmental issues. The sponsorship of these companies is allowing 4-H to expand the program into more states, helping local communities implement water-related projects, such as beach cleaning or water-quality testing. It is also motivating young people to find innovative ways to conserve water. All of which, as one Jam participant pointed out, contributes to meeting the water-neutral goals of their corporate partners.

Successful collaborations like this require mutually reinforcing goals. And program proposals that align strategically. "It is very important to clearly define the benefit to the corporation when seeking a partnership," said Kenya Burks, chief of staff for the City of Vicksburg, Cities of Service. "As we analyze many of the goals of successful service initiatives, we find that they are all tied to business principles in some way or another. Now, the ultimate challenge is articulating these service goals into goals that are easily digestible by the business community. For this, I think it's very important to have a trained staffer who understands both sides (corporate and nonprofit). Second, I think it very important to quantitatively demonstrate how service will ultimately affect everyone, including the business community."