Handout 9: Key Stakeholders/Community Partners

Effective systems advocacy requires research to understand the needs and issues that need to be advocated for. It also depends upon developing collaborative partnerships that are designed to work collectively on the issues, share resources and the workload and thus maximising outcomes for the client groups.

Once the issue has been determined, it is important to identify the people who have most to gain from the process and its outcomes. This will inevitably include people within your own organisation, workers in ‘like’ services, the population group/s most affected and those formal/informal structures that support their interests. The involvement of others in both the planning, implementing and monitoring of the process provides opportunities for:

- Expert advice in the management of the community needs assessment
- Ensures the participation of services and population groups who may otherwise not be aware of the need and the needs assessment
- Encourages ownership of the process and of its outcomes.

For example, if you were assessing the needs/issue affecting women and their children experiencing domestic/family violence and child protection issues, some of the key stakeholders/community partners would be:

- Women’s services working in the provision of early intervention, community education, direct services, eg. accommodation, health, & legal
- Mainstream, i.e. government or government funded services
- Interagencies, networks and forums working on this issue
- Child protection services
- Women experiencing or who have experienced domestic/family violence (bearing in mind issues of consent to participate, right to refuse, confidentiality)
- Peak agencies.

The Business of Welfare The ins and outs of Community and Business Partnership Programs (Source: Geraldine Skinner, Director, Community Business Partnerships).

Over the last 50 years or so, in response to a proliferation of community concerns and causes, the number of community organisations has grown considerably. Estimates vary depending on definitions, but it is safe to say that Australia has more than 200,000 non-profit organisations, ranging from animal refuges sporting clubs, right through to support centres for disadvantaged members of society and charities as big as the Red Cross.

Competition has stretched scarce resources and the public capacity for support has been strained. Partnerships with business are one way of addressing this challenge. They can provide a new source of support and deliver outcomes that benefit not only community groups but also the business itself.
At their best they can also assist in finding more efficient and long-term solutions to community issues. They can build both bonding and bridging social capital.

**Getting Into Partnerships**

Partnerships are relationships and they don’t just happen overnight. Like interpersonal relationships, they often start small and develop slowly over time. They can begin with chance meetings or via mutual contacts.

But it is true that relationships can also be carefully planned. There are some key steps in this process.

**Selecting a Partner**

It is important that potential partners are a good match – that they have similar or complementary interests and values.

First you need to be clear of the external “personality” of your own organisation. You need to have a clear understanding of your own organisation and what distinguishes it from others. Values, clientele, location, subject matter are all importance.

After you have assessed your own organisation it is time to do the same for any possible partners. Research your potential partner extensively by personal inquiry, media articles, trade magazines, annual reports and websites.

**Preparing the Approach:**

Before the approach is made make sure you are clear on what you expect and what can be achieved. There are three key questions:

1. What do you want? You may be looking for funding, pro-bono professional advice, volunteers, goods-in-kind, assistance with advocacy or a combination of these.

2. What are you able to offer your potential partner? You may be able to offer a raised public profile, access to key markets, staff benefits, brand or profile building, a useful network of contacts, skills that the partner organisation does not have, increased media coverage.

3. In what time frame do you want these goals reached (long-term, short-term)? It should be remembered that mutual benefit generally builds over time.

**Approaching Partners:**

Once you are clear about what type of organisation you are approaching, what you are hoping to achieve and how it can be achieved, it is then time to find the right person to contact. This doesn’t mean preparation of a lengthy and detailed written submission. It means starting the dialogue.
The right person may not necessarily be the Chief Executive or General Manager. It could be the Community or Public Relations Officer or Sponsorship Manager.

Depending on the type of partnership being proposed, you may want to approach a different section of the potential partner’s organisation. If you are proposing to increase brand image or media coverage it may be more suitable to approach the marketing or communications manager. If you anticipate your partnership will have a staff involvement component you may benefit by contacting the Human Resources Manager.

These initial meetings are important in assessing the fit or the chemistry between the partners, to find out whether there is potential for development of a relationship. It is important to stress that you are not simply asking for funds.

**Reaching an Agreement:**

For an agreement to be reached from both partners it is important that the relationship be approached openly and honestly. This is necessary from the beginning of the relationship. Both partners must be explicit about their expectations of the partnership. A good example of this is in pro bono work. It needs to be clear from the beginning that the client should be treated the same as paying client, not put to the bottom of the pile when commercial clients deadlines clash.

Documenting the agreement is sensible so that the corporate memory is not lost if particular personnel move on. In some cases, it may also be appropriate to draw up a formal agreement or contract.

**Maintaining the Relationship:**

Like any other relationships, partnerships need to be nurtured and carefully maintained. Open and regular communication, both formal and informal is the key. In more extensive and formal partnerships, performance indicators and benchmarks established at the outset provide a basis for discussion and useful feedback.

**What Can Come Out of Partnerships?**

Partnerships can provide various benefits that have often been summarised under the banner of the 7 Ps:

- Product
- People
- Premises
- Purchasing Power
- Promotion
- Power
- Profit.
More fundamentally, though the outcome of partnerships is increased sustainability for organisations, particularly when partnerships become more formal and agreements are in place for several years.

Predicability about the level of resources allows organisations to plan ahead with confidence.

Interestingly a recent study undertaken by the Business Council of Australia, in conjunction with the Centre for Corporate Public Affairs has demonstrated that sustainability is also one of the main reasons that businesses enter partnerships.

The great majority of companies in the study supported involvement with the community as part of an expanding social role that contributes to the continuing health and growth of their businesses. Long-term business sustainability, not profitability, was at the heart of corporate community involvement. The benefits businesses recognise are in the boost to intangible assets – reputation, community support and the ‘licence to operate’.

And perhaps that is the bottom line for the community as well - that partnerships founded on mutual respect and delivering reciprocal benefits will contribute to the sustainability of society.

**Partnership Model**

The伙伴关系 model, premised on collaboration, is described as a mechanism for enabling government, services contracting agencies and contractors to join together as partners in joint ventures designed to maximise the outputs of a state or community human service system through collaborative action.

Other key features of the partnership model are:

- It works to strengthen the relationship with other service providers
- It promotes flexibility and negotiation in the development and management of service agreements
- It is cautious in experimenting with different models of service delivery
- It promotes specialisation amongst service providers; and
- It makes purchasing decisions based on the stability and maintenance of the service system.