

Sustainable Partnerships

Partnerships between business and non-profit sectors can bring about great success. Long-term partnerships can help heritage organizations with preservation projects and securing funding. Community partnerships have mutual benefits. Here are some tips for developing sustainable partnerships.



Many conversations take place in building a partnership between Oregon Century of Action and students and faculty at Western Oregon University.

1) Get To Know Each Other

Partnerships grow best on a firm ground of mutual knowledge and understanding. Learn about the values, priorities and limitations of potential partners, and show them how they will benefit from collaboration.

2) Maintain Open Communication

Establish and maintain open lines of communication between key contacts at each partner organization. This is essential, particularly for partnerships consisting of organizations with no history of cooperation.

3) Break New Ground and Old Habits

Reach out to new and unlikely collaborators. Effective partnerships will acknowledge and overcome stereotypes, develop new habits of cooperation, and curb unrealistic expectations.

4) Share Decision Making

Share the decision making authority and responsibility equitably with the participating partners. All partners must feel welcome and believe that their contributions are valued.

5) Share Responsibility and Costs

Partners need to be clear about what they can contribute to any project, whether it is time, money, or influence. Define the roles and responsibilities of partners up front.

6) Work Toward Shared Goals

Partnerships should be based around shared goals that reflect the mutual self-interests of the participating organizations. Be aware that the missions of other partner organizations differ from your own. Understand the potential consequences of the partnership's actions for each of the partners.



A collaboration of Maxville Heritage Center, Oregon State University and the Tamástlikt Cultural Institute led to work on a cataloging project.

7) Be Realistic

Know what your partners can afford to contribute to partnership projects, both in terms of time, money and other resources—and know what additional resources are available from outside sources.

8) Identify Leadership

One organization or individual needs to take on a leadership role to sustain the partnership. The leader must not abuse the leadership position to forward an individual agenda.



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9) Secure Commitment for the Long Term

Most partnerships begin with a rush of enthusiasm. Long-term partnerships, like any strong relationship, require patience, flexibility, inclusiveness, respect for differences and a willingness to accept leadership roles—and a clear understanding from the very beginning about roles and responsibilities.

10) Plan for the Future

Strong partnerships plan for the future by identifying mutual goals and targeting the human and financial resources required to achieve these goals.



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