



SAC Nonprofit Experts Bulletin

Nonprofit Collaborations & Partnerships

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NONPROFIT COLLABORATIONS & PARTNERSHIPS

Guest editor: [Gail Bower, Bower & Co. Consulting LLC](#)

On a drizzly Saturday evening in March 2021, still in the throes of the pandemic, I pulled up a bar stool in my kitchen, opened my laptop, and suddenly I was at a jazz club on the East Coast of the U.S.

I'd tuned in to the [East Coast Jazz Festival](#), a first-time collaboration by six renowned jazz clubs: Sculler Jazz Club in Boston; Birdland and Smalls in New York City; Chris' Jazz Café in Philadelphia; Keystone Korner in Baltimore; and Blues Alley in Washington, D.C.

This innovative partnership, featuring 60 artists in both live and pre-recorded performances, kept jazz alive, artists working, club owners supported, and jazz enthusiasts (somewhat) sated.

This jazz partnership is just one of thousands of partnerships and collaborations that happen in the nonprofit and for-profit sectors each day. Some are revenue-driven, some are mission-driven, and some use a systemic approach.

Sephora, Kohls, Target, Apple, and Nordstrom **are [all doing it](#)** to expand customers and retail traffic.

M.M. LaFleur and Zappo's have [teamed up](#) to support women getting back to work, after having to step out of the workforce during the pandemic.

A group of education nonprofits in Pennsylvania has formed a collaborative to raise awareness of unfair state education funding to coincide with a landmark trial that goes to court this fall.

As you'll soon discover from a global group of nonprofit experts, nonprofits and associations collaborate, too.

We've assembled **the most important resources on partnerships and collaborations** to help leaders like you think and work through the essential strategic and operational details. Spend time here, and share these resources with your board, top leadership, and even your colleagues. Consider:

- Is collaboration an approach that would enable your organization to expand revenue, reach, impact, and influence?
- Are you considering collaboration for the *right* reasons?
- Might you experiment with a short-term project or event before diving in?
- Do you have the mindset and openness to make collaboration work?

You'll find answers to these and many other important questions in the invaluable resources that follow.

CONSIDERATIONS IN THE EARLY STAGES OF COLLABORATIONS

- Many nonprofits are attempting to engage more deeply to ensure their organizations reflect diversity in employment, perspectives, priorities and decision-making regimes. Working with indigenous communities requires a deep understanding about fundamental issues which go even beyond considerations typically related to Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI). [How Your Nonprofit Can Do Its Part in Relationships with Indigenous Peoples and Organizations in North America](#) by Canada-based **Gwen Bridge** is an important set of recommendations.
- [We Need To Talk](#) by U.K.-based **Martyn Drake** is a relatively short, simple article outlining with personal examples, the case for having open, honest, knowledge-sharing conversations with peers across different organisations. It's essentially the "first steps in collaboration" primer.
- You're forming a new partnership to support your nonprofit's work. Check out [New Partnership Tool, Setting Expectations](#) by U.S.-based **Karen Eber Davis** for a set of questions to help you and your partner establish expectations for your work together.

SYSTEMS, STRATEGY & VISION

- In U.S.-based **Gail Bower's** [4 Strategies for Joining Forces](#) consider whether collaboration makes sense for your organization at the strategic level and what you can hope to achieve.
- Have you identified all the levers of the system at the heart of your mission? Are you doing all you can to address root causes, either through your own programs or through collaborators? In [Create Stronger Systems through Collaboration](#), **Gail Bower** shows that the best collaborations begin with getting the right people together.
- [Necessity Is the Mother Of Collaboration](#) by **Martyn Drake** is for the more advanced reader and explains why, despite the fact we all we know that we should collaborate more, we don't prioritise it. The reason? Because we all set our strategic goals around the interventions or services that we deliver – on things that are exclusively within our own control. If, instead, we set our goals based on the visionary outcomes we hope to see in society, knowing that they are goals we can't achieve alone, collaboration would move instantly from the periphery of our plans to the core.
- In this [complimentary chapter](#) of Australia-based **Andrew Hollo's** book on nonprofit strategic direction setting, *From Impossible to Possible*, he shows you how to recruit the right partners so that you can successfully work towards a common cause. You'll also learn how to agree on shared principles, and how to determine the desired depth of your partnerships. It's backed up with practical examples and models and frameworks you can use immediately in your organisation. (Also, see Andrew's special offer below.)
- [The Benefits and Risks of Partnerships](#) by U.S.-based **Rebecca White** includes a quick way to check the potential strategic clarity of a partnership.

BUSINESS PARTNERSHIPS

- [Engaging With Business](#) by **Martyn Drake** outlines the two opportunities charities can unlock from business collaborations: money and impact. And it explains why the latter of those two is far, far greater than the former.
- Another piece by **Martyn Drake**, [The New Skills For Social Change](#), builds on that same idea, that business can be a more powerful force for good if nonprofits can only build a better understanding and deeper relationships into the business community.

MAKING PARTNERSHIPS & COLLABORATIONS WORK

- If your organization is serious about making partnership and collaborations work, start here for [10 Best Practices and Ingredients for Success](#) by **Gail Bower**.
- Take things a step further in [Sponsorship Relationship Mantra](#) by **Gail Bower** and learn how to have fun and keep things flowing in any sort of collaborative relationship, including corporate sponsorship.
- How can you create lasting partnerships that not only establish your nonprofit but help accelerate its growth? Listen in with U.S.-based **Patton McDowell** who explores that question in a podcast episode, entitled [Maximizing Partnerships for Nonprofit Success](#).

WHEN THINGS GET DIFFICULT

- Two-thirds of nonprofit organizations collaborate with others for a wide range of reasons, so obviously something's working well with the concept. But what about when they don't work well? Check out **Gail Bower's** [Collaboration Challenges and What to do About Them](#)
- In **Gail Bower's** [The Bad Deal](#) find out your three possible actions when you finally realize you're in a bad deal.
- In her piece, [How to Deal with Difficult Nonprofit Partnerships](#), **Karen Eber Davis** says that trustworthy partners make life easier. Bad partners are a time-sucking and energy-draining menace. What are the signs that you should end or fix a partnership?

SPECIAL OFFER: If you enjoyed Andrew Hollo's chapter on partnership, [download the entire book, From Impossible to Possible](#), with his compliments. Offer ends on 31st May 2021.

The [Nonprofit Expert Community](#) is a specialist group within the Society for the Advancement of Consulting, each of whom has been selected and approved for membership based on their consulting history, client endorsements, and ongoing commitment to a high standard of practice, ethics and professionalism.