

## Interdev – NEXT

### 15 Critical Principles: The Local Church in Partnership

Whether churches seek partnerships with other churches/Christian organizations to reach/serve their communities or reach out internationally, success is often elusive. Twelve years of field experience of building lasting, successful ministry partnerships have revealed certain common themes. Build your ministry partnership with these principles and the likelihood of success is high. Ignore them and failure is very likely!

1. **Effective partnerships are built on trust, openness and mutual concern.** Partnerships are more than coordination, planning, strategies and tactics. The heart of the Gospel is restored relationships. Spending time on getting to know, understand and appreciate each other is not an option.
2. **Lasting partnerships need a facilitator or coordinator** – someone who, by consensus, has been given the role of bringing the partnership to life and keeping the fires burning. This “honest broker,” usually loaned or seconded from a church or ministry, committed to the task, must be a person of vision who will keep on despite all discouragement. Prophet, servant and resource person – this individual has to be trained and nurtured. One person serving everyone in a partnership is a lonely task.
3. **Successful partnerships develop in order to accomplish a specific vision or task.** Partnership for partnership’s sake is a sure recipe for failure. Warm “fellowship” is not enough. This means lasting partnerships focus primarily on what (objectives) rather than how (structure). Form always follows function – not the other way around. Consensus is usually better than constitution! Focus on purpose. Structure should be only the minimum required to get the job done.
4. **Effective partnerships have limited, achievable objectives in the beginning:** more expansive as the group experiences success. Though limited, these objectives must have clear:
  - A. Kingdom significance that captures the imagination and provides motivation for the group
  - B. Relevance to each church or partner ministry’s vision and objective
5. **Effective partnerships start by identifying needs among the people being reached or served.** They do not start by trying to write a common theological statement. From these needs, Kingdom priorities, barriers to spiritual breakthroughs, and the resources available or needed, realistic priorities for action must be distilled and agreed.
6. **Effective partnerships have a partnership “champion” inside every partner church or other ministry** – a person who sees how their church or ministry can benefit from such practical cooperation; an individual who will sell the vision to their colleagues and keep the partnership focused to realize those benefits.
7. **Partnerships are a process, not an event.** The start-up, exploration and formation stages of a partnership often take a long time. Call a formation or even exploratory meeting too early and you will likely kill the possibility of a partnership. Ultimately personal trust is required. Taking time to establish it privately in one-on-one meetings, the facilitator will find that later, in the group, it will pay rich dividends.

8. **Effective partnerships are even more challenging to maintain than to start.** Making sure the vision stays alive, the focus clear, communications good, and outcomes fulfilling takes great concentration and long-term commitment.
9. **Effective partnerships are made up of partners with clear identities and vision.** The churches and other ministries involved must have their own clear mission statements and live by them. Otherwise they will never understand how they “fit in,” contribute to the overall picture, or benefit from the joint effort.
10. **Effective partnerships acknowledge, even celebrate, the differences** in their partner ministries’ histories, vision, and services. But partnerships must ultimately concentrate on what they have in common, like vision and values, and ministry objectives rather than on their differences.
11. **Effective partnerships serve at least four constituencies:** the people they are trying to reach; the partner churches/ministries with their own staffs and vision; the partner funding and praying constituencies behind each of these ministries; and, eventually, the partnership itself with its growing expectations. There are many more players around the table than we often acknowledge, or remember. Forget them and their need for information, participation and fulfillment, and eventually the partnership will fail.
12. **Effective partnerships have a high sense of participation and ownership.** Facilitators need to give special attention to the widest possible participation in objective-setting, planning and the process of meetings, and on-going communications – increasing the likelihood of widest possible ownership and commitment to the common vision.
13. **Effective partnerships see prayer and communion as uniquely powerful elements** to bind partners together in Christ. Effective partnerships are refreshed and empowered by frequently praying in small groups where individuals can express concern for each other’s personal needs; and by the group taking communion together.
14. **Effective partnerships do not come free.** Just participating in the exploration, planning, launching and coordination takes time and money. Deeper commitment may take still greater investments. But, the “return on Kingdom investment” through the partnerships should more than offset the contributions a church or other ministry may make.
15. **Effective partnerships expect problems and pro-actively deal with them.** Make sure a process is built into the partnership for dealing with changes, exceptions, disappointments, unfulfilled commitments, and simply the unexpected. Small problems must be addressed immediately. A wise man knows one thing – the only predictable thing is the unexpected.

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