

HELPING CHURCHES NAVIGATE THEIR ECONOMIC FUTURE

# HOW TO PARTNER WELL



**A GUIDE TO HELP  
CONGREGATIONS CREATE AND  
ENHANCE PARTNERSHIPS**



It could only make sense to create a tool about partnership in partnership. With thanks to our collaborators from:



# INTRODUCTION

This is a tool to help congregations create and enhance partnerships. Partnering with people and organizations is a vital part of a congregation fulfilling its mission effectively in a community. This is particularly true if a congregation is engaging in social enterprise activity and/or new uses for its building(s) and land. Non-profit organizations and other entities will also find this tool helpful, but some of the language is geared toward use by congregations.

If you are a congregation seeking to partner, this is a framework to help you determine what is most important for you and what to prioritize.

This tool will help to generate good conversations within the church so that members and leaders will be able to:

- ★ Understand what a good partnership looks like
- ★ Come to a shared sense of the best type of partnership for your congregation
- ★ Set up your partnership(s) in a way that creates shared understanding, thriving communities, and successful ventures

# PART ONE: UNDERSTANDING PARTNERSHIP

## WHAT IS “PARTNERSHIP”

### AND WHY IS IT IMPORTANT FOR OUR CONGREGATION?

We define a partnership as “intentionally working with another entity/entities to achieve something transformative together.”

Partnership is the word we use for joining together, consciously committing ourselves to a relationship that will help both partners move toward their goals. Partnership acknowledges a truth that already exists: that we are all connected to one another. But it’s more than that. Partnership is an intentional shaping of that connection, naming the relationship, defining what we expect of one another, so that we can work together with health and honesty.



*Congregations are often already involved in partnerships – even if the specific word “partnership” is not used.*

This could be with a denomination and judicatory, or with other organizations or service providers in their local community.

In the context of a rapidly changing religious landscape, congregations increasingly have the opportunity, and sometimes necessity, to partner with a diverse range of organizations. This creates the possibility of making a difference in the wider community.

KEEP  
READING

## WHAT IS PARTNERSHIP? CNTD.

There are two likely routes a congregation takes in the journey toward forming new partnerships.

The first is based on the shared experience of many congregations – one of decreasing participation and a decline in giving, resulting in fewer internal resources (such as volunteers and finances) for engaging in any new activity. Working with others could be the most realistic way to write the next chapter of the congregation’s story.

Other churches might not be experiencing this decline but are starting the journey toward forming partnerships based on an aspiration to explore new ways of fulfilling their mission and purpose in their local communities.



Whether your starting point is necessity or aspiration, you are not alone. Many congregations across the country are forming new partnerships with a wide variety of entities: non-profits, businesses, other churches, local government, community associations, recovery groups, housing providers, libraries, healthcare systems, and more. If done well, these partnerships can be a source of vitality, sustainability, and – crucially – a means of fulfilling the mission and purpose of your congregation in exciting new ways.

As you work through this tool, be mindful that forming good partnerships is not just about the strengths, qualities, and skills of your potential partner organization. It also depends on your congregation learning to be a good partner. This is a great opportunity for your congregation to grow and develop – not just in what you do, but who you are.

# THE ESSENTIAL INGREDIENTS

There are almost endless ways to partner, and later in the guide you will assess your specific needs and requirements. However, there are five key ingredients that partnerships of any shape or scale need to have to be successful.

## 1.

### TRUST

The belief that the other party will act with honesty, integrity, and reliability. It involves being truthful, adhering to moral and ethical principles, fulfilling commitments and expectations, and being able to share ideas openly.

## 2.

### MUTUAL BENEFIT

Both parties derive advantages or value from the relationship. It involves aligning ideas and working toward a common purpose, ensuring both parties contribute and receive in a way agreed in advance.

## 3.

### CLARITY OF PURPOSE

A shared understanding of the goals, objectives, and mission of the partnership. It involves defined goals, shared vision, aligned expectations, and periodic assessment and adjustment of goals to ensure they remain relevant.

## 4.

### TRANSPARENCY

Openness and honesty in communication and dealings. It involves accountability, visibility, and trustworthiness. Essentially, transparency fosters trust, reduces misunderstandings, and promotes a healthy and collaborative partnership.

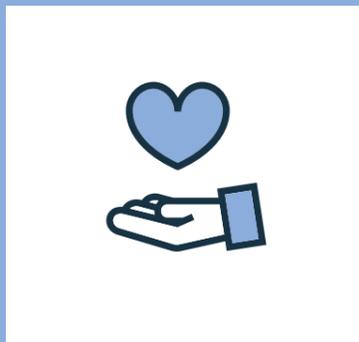
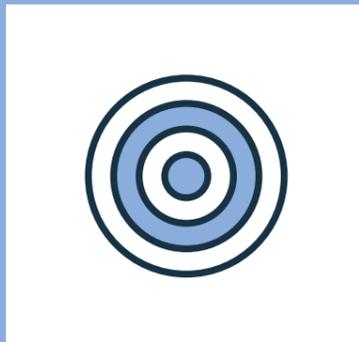
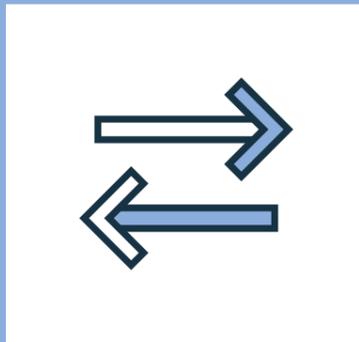
## 5.

### COMMUNICATION

Effective communication is essential for building trust and resolving any potential conflicts within the partnership. It should be intentional and requires both parties to listen well, speak clearly, and pay attention to nonverbal communication.

# TYPES OF PARTNERSHIP

Congregations can enter various types of partnerships: operational, impact, and currency. These collaborations serve different purposes, from managing resources to creating social impact or increasing capital.



## OPERATIONAL

An operational partnership focuses on resource management, like leasing church property to a business or sharing facilities. It optimizes assets while supporting the church's mission.

## IMPACT

Impact partnerships aim to achieve social and spiritual goals, such as reducing food insecurity or increasing mental wellness. These collaborations focus on creating meaningful, positive change in communities.

## CURRENCY

Currency partnerships increase capital, whether financial, social, or another resource. They enhance the value flowing between partners, boosting both their missions and capacity to grow.

# SHAPES OF PARTNERSHIP

Once we know what type of partnership we are building, we can layer over these factors, with each existing on a spectrum, to define the shape of the outcome. These questions will help you understand the partnership on a deeper level.

## NECESSITY

Is this partnership something you have to pursue because it is critical for your congregation or is it more optional?

CRITICAL |-----| OPTIONAL

## DEPTH

How deep is the connection with your partner? Does this partnership require a thick relationship, working closely together, or a thin relationship with just a few touch points?

THICK |-----| THIN

## FORMALITY

How formal is this partnership? Can it be based on a handshake or does it need a 150-page contract? Or is it somewhere in between?

FORMAL |-----| INFORMAL

## DURATION

How long is this partnership likely to last? Is it, in principle, unending or is it likely to last for a short period of time?

LONG |-----| SHORT

# ACTIVITY: DEFINING PARTNERSHIPS

The purpose of this exercise is to understand the type and shape of a partnership. This is less about evaluating the success of the relationship or outcome, and more about knowing what factors are at play.<sup>1</sup>

## ACTIVITY DIRECTIONS

Read through each case study in turn and mark on the evaluation card which type of partnership you think it is. (It can be more than one!) Then make a mark on each scale to define the shape of the partnership.



**WHAT TYPE OF PARTNERSHIP IS THIS?**

OPERATIONAL

IMPACT

CURRENCY

CRITICAL ————— NECESSITY ————— X ————— OPTIONAL

THICK ————— X ————— DEPTH ————— THIN

FORMAL ————— FORMALITY ————— X ————— INFORMAL

LONG ————— DURATION ————— X ————— SHORT

## COMMUNITY BLESSING INITIATIVE CENTER

There is a small five-person church in a rural town that lacks basic services to support the community. The closest hospital is 30 miles away. Public transit is scarce.

In 2019 the Department of Health asked for help from all 120 faith communities in their county. This five-person church was the only congregation to answer. Equipped with a 125 year old building and a desire to serve the most vulnerable, they created a Community Blessing Initiative Center.

The church provided the building and the hospitality, while the county provided financial support to provide emergency shelter to a dozen individuals per night. Expectations were agreed upon upfront and both the church and the county approached the alliance with authenticity and integrity. This partnership blueprint led to an invitation from the county to expand services and the partnership circle. Today, the Center offers wraparound services from seven different agencies to care for the whole person, including substance use disorder therapies, legal aid, and peer support.



**WHAT TYPE OF PARTNERSHIP IS THIS?**

OPERATIONAL

IMPACT

CURRENCY

CRITICAL ————— NECESSITY ————— OPTIONAL

THICK ————— DEPTH ————— THIN

FORMAL ————— FORMALITY ————— INFORMAL

LONG ————— DURATION ————— SHORT

<sup>1</sup>The case studies have been anonymized.



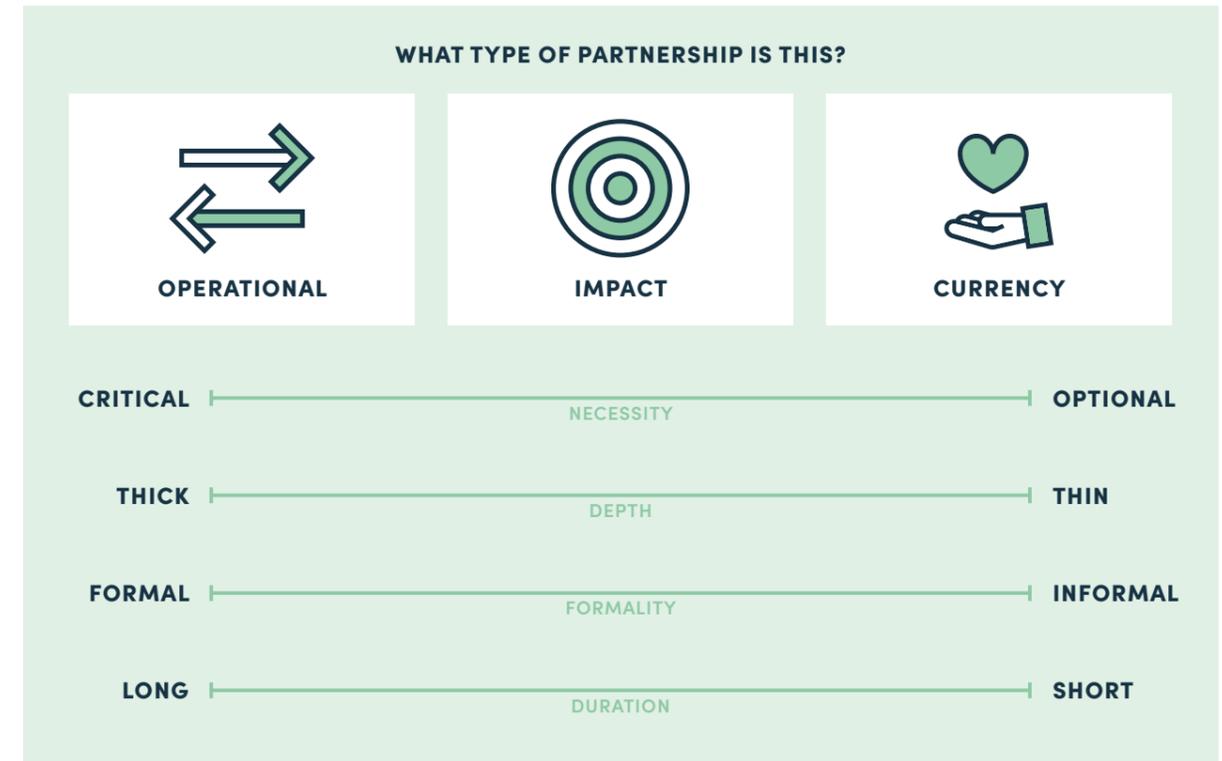
## AFFORDABLE HOUSING DEVELOPMENT

Mercy Church of Christ forged a significant partnership with a non-profit organization focused on affordable housing to confront the pressing housing crisis in their area.

Recognizing the urgent need for accessible housing, the two entities collaborated to donate land and pool resources, resulting in the development of a new housing community dedicated to low-income families. This partnership facilitated the construction of dozens of affordable homes, directly impacting the lives of individuals and families grappling with housing insecurity.

By addressing this systemic issue, Mercy Church and the non-profit not only provided shelter but also offered stability and hope to those in need. The collaboration exemplified how faith communities and non-profit organizations can unite to enact meaningful change and foster long-lasting improvements in their neighborhood. As families moved into their new homes, the project contributed to revitalizing the community, creating a supportive environment where residents could thrive.

This initiative serves as a powerful example of how dedicated partnerships can tackle complex social challenges and reflect a commitment to justice, equity, and community empowerment.

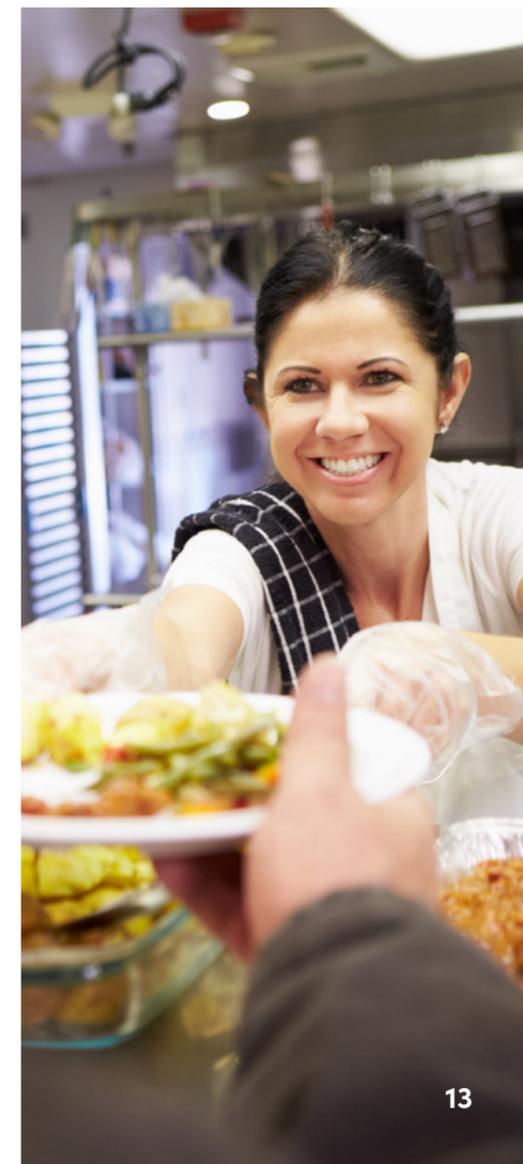


## WINTER SHELTER COLLABORATION

Zion ABC Church and Mt. Vernon Place Church came together in a powerful partnership to operate a cold-weather shelter during the harsh winter months, pooling their resources, volunteers, and facilities to provide crucial care for vulnerable individuals in their community.

This collaboration offered a warm and safe refuge for hundreds of people facing extreme weather conditions, demonstrating the impact of unified efforts in addressing urgent social needs. The churches shared responsibilities effectively, coordinating logistics, staffing, and resources to ensure the shelter operated smoothly and efficiently. They not only provided shelter but also offered meals, warmth, and a sense of community to those in need. Volunteers from both congregations came together, fostering interfaith collaboration and strengthening relationships among diverse groups.

This partnership exemplified how unity and shared purpose can mobilize community resources to tackle critical issues, offering life-saving services to the most vulnerable. The success of the winter shelter highlighted the importance of collaboration among local faith communities, inspiring others to explore similar partnerships and engage in meaningful acts of service during times of crisis.





## “PAY IT FORWARD” CAFÉ

Second Presbyterian Church collaborated with a local food entrepreneur to establish a “pay it forward” café within its building, creating a unique community space that promotes generosity and inclusivity.

In this innovative model, customers could not only purchase meals for themselves but also contribute to the well-being of others by buying meals for those in need.

This café became a welcoming haven for individuals from all walks of life, allowing everyone, regardless of their financial situation, to enjoy a nutritious meal with dignity. By addressing food insecurity, the café provided regular, wholesome meals to individuals who might otherwise go without, fostering a sense of community and compassion. The initiative encouraged patrons to connect, share stories, and support one another, building relationships and a sense of belonging. The café not only served as a source of nourishment but also as a model of generosity, illustrating how faith-based organizations can creatively engage with local issues.

Through this partnership, Second Presbyterian Church demonstrated a commitment to social responsibility and community uplift, inspiring others to adopt similar initiatives that prioritize compassion and inclusivity.

### WHAT TYPE OF PARTNERSHIP IS THIS?



OPERATIONAL



IMPACT



CURRENCY



## PAY ATTENTION

Every partnership involves navigating risk and power, and each partner experiences these differently.

Partnerships will not always be equally balanced, but healthy partnerships grow out of a commitment to respect and understand how each partner has power in the relationship and how each is at risk in the relationship.

### RISK

A partnership can become exploitative if one partner has more at risk than the other. Fair partnerships recognize risk, ensuring both parties feel secure and respected.

### POWER

Examine who holds power in the relationship. Beware of imbalances that lead to control or dominance. Healthy partnerships acknowledge power, fostering collaboration and mutual respect.



Pause here and reflect on risk and power dynamics, using the questions on page 23.

# PART TWO: PREPARING TO PARTNER

## SUCCESSFUL PREPARATION

Entering partnerships thoughtfully is key to achieving lasting impact. When done well, partnerships amplify your mission, align with your vision, and create meaningful, sustainable change.

Before entering a partnership, it's vital to be clear on the vision that drives your collaboration. This section helps you clarify that vision, assess your readiness, and provides a diagnostic tool for evaluating potential partnerships.

You'll also explore the different types of partnerships – operational, impact, and currency – and determine which aligns best with your mission. Thoughtful preparation ensures your partnership is structured for success, allowing you to fulfil the good you want to bring into the world.

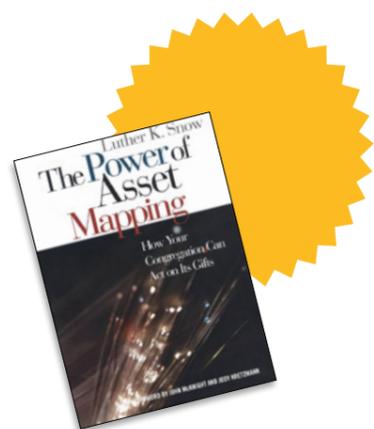
# GOALS ASSESSMENT

To develop strong and purposeful partnerships, it is crucial to first define the vision driving the collaboration. A clear, shared goal helps focus the partnership. Articulate the problem you are hoping to solve, the need you are aiming to address, and/or the opportunity you are responding to.

Congregations can fall into one of two traps. Either feeling they have to do it all themselves, or failing to recognize the gifting and skills already in the congregation.

Use this exercise to discuss and articulate your goal for the project and partnership that you envision. Consider how you can join with a partner to match your gifts with their gaps and your gaps with their gifts. If you are evaluating an existing partnership - articulate the goal of the partnership and consider the gifts and gaps that exist in the current partnership.

For a partnership to be genuine and successful, this all needs to be discussed and tested with your partner(s). The goal may shift a little as you coordinate and collaborate with partner(s).



For a deeper dive on asset mapping, check out Luther Snow's book, *The Power of Asset Mapping*.

## ACTIVITY TIME

Read the examples provided on the right to help complete a goals assessment for your partnership. This doesn't have to be perfect, but should help your team to get on the same page about what you are setting out to do.

## EXAMPLE #1

**OUR GIFTS (WHAT WE HAVE)**

- Commitment to human health and flourishing
- Members with experience and expertise in mental health professions

**OUR GAPS (WHAT WE ARE MISSING)**

- Underutilized space in our church building
- Personnel to provide day-to-day services
- Legal, liability, and other practical knowledge structures to provide mental health services
- Funding to launch church-run center (need a partner with a proven business model)
- Deep understanding of the unique mental health concerns of residents in our community who have a variety of backgrounds and life experiences

**WHO ELSE CARES ABOUT THIS GOAL?**

NAME: Abundant Life Counseling

GIFTS ASSETS CONTRIBUTIONS: Local small business counseling center with good reputation for delivering the services we hope to provide and that is looking for new space

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NAME: Local chapter of NAMI (National Alliance on Mental Health)

GIFTS ASSETS CONTRIBUTIONS: Advocacy and resource organization dedicated to improving mental health and with deep understanding of our local community

**PARTNERSHIP GOAL:**

Support the mental health of members of our congregation and residents of our neighborhood with counseling and wellness coaching.

## EXAMPLE #2

**OUR GIFTS (WHAT WE HAVE)**

- Land
- Community connections
- Passion for the neighborhood
- Commitment to economic justice

**OUR GAPS (WHAT WE ARE MISSING)**

- Financial capital
- Zoning expertise
- Connections to other key partners: architects, contractors, investors, property managers, etc.
- Development expertise

**WHO ELSE CARES ABOUT THIS GOAL?**

NAME: ABC Developer

GIFTS ASSETS CONTRIBUTIONS: Non-profit developer with expertise in affordable housing

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NAME: DEF Developer

GIFTS ASSETS CONTRIBUTIONS: Mission-aligned, for-profit, developer with excellent track record of completing successful projects

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NAME: XYZ Real Estate Advisory Team

GIFTS ASSETS CONTRIBUTIONS: Not a developer but expertise on how to advise congregation on our gaps

**PARTNERSHIP GOAL:**

Develop our land for a community center and affordable housing in order to extend the mission and ministry of our congregation, support community needs, and generate new revenue streams

## OUR GIFTS (WHAT WE HAVE)

Name the passions, gifts, resources, spaces, funds, assets, etc, that you are bringing to the partnerships in order to address the articulated goal. Assets to consider: physical, relational, experience and skills, aspiration and desire.

## OUR GAPS (WHAT WE ARE MISSING)

Name the things on your needs list you would struggle to fulfil from inside your congregation. It's important to be honest at this stage about your capacity and where your expertise lies. What gaps do you need help with?

# PARTNERSHIP GOAL:

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## WHO ELSE CARES ABOUT THIS GOAL?

Identify potential partners based on who cares about this goal and could join you in partnership. Describe what you imagine what gifts they may bring to the partnership. Note: If you don't know who cares about this, consider doing some community listening and outreach to find out who cares about this. You could also create and issue a Request for Proposals (RFP) as part of a more formal process to identify a partner.

**NAME OF PERSON/ORGANIZATION:**

**GIFTS ASSETS CONTRIBUTIONS:**

**NAME OF PERSON/ORGANIZATION:**

**GIFTS ASSETS CONTRIBUTIONS:**

**NAME OF PERSON/ORGANIZATION:**

**GIFTS ASSETS CONTRIBUTIONS:**

# PARTNERSHIP ASSESSMENT

Now that we've learned all about partnerships and what makes them successful, it's time to assess where yours is at. If you are yet to identify the partnership you will undertake, use this tool to identify what you already know, and what you need to find out.

## WHAT IS THE INTENDED IMPACT OR OUTCOME OF THIS PARTNERSHIP?

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.....

## WHAT TYPE OF PARTNERSHIP IS THIS?



**OPERATION**



**IMPACT**



**CURRENCY**

CRITICAL |----- NECESSITY -----| OPTIONAL

THICK |----- DEPTH -----| THIN

FORMAL |----- FORMALITY -----| INFORMAL

LONG |----- DURATION -----| SHORT

## WHERE IS TRUST AT THE MOMENT?

HIGH |-----| LOW

## WHAT ARE WE GOING TO DO TO BUILD/PRESERVE TRUST?

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.....

## WHAT ATTITUDES/ POSTURE DOES THIS REQUIRE TO DO WELL?

(We've checked a few we think are essential to any partnership. It might be tempting to check them all, but take time to realistically consider your partnership – you might be surprised!)

- Respect
- Mutual accountability
- Flexibility
- Realism
- Adaptability
- Generosity
- Curiosity
- Friendliness
- Humility
- Appetite for risk
- Shared values
- Grace
- .....
- .....
- .....
- .....

## WHAT DOES GOOD LOOK LIKE FOR OUR CONGREGATION?

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## WHAT DOES GOOD LOOK LIKE FOR OUR PARTNER(S)?

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## WHAT DOES GOOD LOOK LIKE FOR OUR PARTNERSHIP?

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## WHAT DOES GOOD LOOK LIKE FOR OUR COMMUNITY?

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## HAVE WE EXAMINED WHERE WE HAVE POWER AND WHERE WE MIGHT HAVE RISK?

- Yes
- No

## DO WE UNDERSTAND HOW OUR PARTNER HAS POWER AND WHAT ARE THEIR RISKS?

- Yes
- No

## BASED ON THE POWER DYNAMIC, ARE WE SURE THIS IS DEFINITELY A PARTNERSHIP?

- Yes
- No

## DO WE UNDERSTAND THE WAYS THIS PARTNERSHIP COULD BECOME EXPLOITATIVE?

- Yes
- No



# PART THREE: GETTING PRACTICAL

## WHAT NEXT?

Now that you have explored partnerships and prepared for a new partnership (or evaluated an existing partnership) it is time to move into action.

Turning a partnership idea or conversation into reality may include a number of practical elements.

This section contains some of the nuts-and-bolts details you will need to consider when getting ready for launch. Please note: It's not an exhaustive list; depending on your context there will be many factors to weigh, and you might not need all of these. Each partnership is as unique as the congregations seeking to form them. Make sure to spend some time in conversation, thinking about your launch plan.

# A FEW THINGS TO CONSIDER

## REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS (RFP)

You may have a partner in mind for a particular purpose or goal, or a relationship that has been developing for a while. That is fantastic. But you may also have a goal or purpose in mind, but not have a specific partner to work with. An example of this might be finding a developer to help build on your property or finding a property manager for facilities operations. If you are looking for a partner, you could create a Request for Proposal (RFP) to identify and then screen potential partners. A Request for Proposal (RFP) is a formal document issued by an organization to solicit proposals from potential partners for a specific project or service, outlining the project requirements and evaluation criteria.

## PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENTS

Depending on the context and nature of the partnership, you may want or need to formalize expectations and terms through an agreement. Consider the following options (and always seek legal advice for contracts and covenants).

### MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING

A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) is an agreement between parties that outlines their intentions and terms of cooperation, which can be either binding or non-binding, depending on the language used and the parties' intent. An MOU is the best way to set up a partnership agreement when the parties want to outline their intentions and collaborative framework, and when the partnership involves flexible terms that may evolve over time or when the parties do not want to execute a full legal contract.

### CONTRACT

A contract is an agreement that sets forth what each partner requires to be sure that their own needs are met. It defines each partner's roles and responsibilities, including financial obligations, to one another. A signed contract can be enforced legally.

### COVENANT AGREEMENT

A covenant is a set of promises the partners make to one another for each partner's mutual well-being. It is enforceable not by law, but by a commitment of fidelity, shared values, and ethics. A written covenant agreement is ideal for structuring a long-term commitment to a partnership that recognizes varying contributions, high stakes, and a need for alternative forms of conflict resolution.

## TAX IMPLICATIONS

If this partnership involves the transfer of money and/or the use of space in a building, it may have tax implications for your congregation. You may need to account for property taxes, unrelated business income tax, or other tax implications. Tax considerations should not prevent you from engaging in a good partnership but they will need to be understood and sorted out. Consult a local tax attorney or CPA with non-profit expertise to understand these implications. Also check out RootedGood's *What About Taxes?!!!* tool for more information on taxation.

## OTHER LEGAL QUESTIONS

Does this partnership raise other legal questions you may need to address? For example: Are there zoning ordinances that limit what kind of activity you or a partner can operate? Are there food safety regulations you need to be aware of if your partner is handling food? Are there other legal implications of the rental agreements you are considering? Are you required to inform your denomination or judicatory about this? Do you need written permission from your denomination or judicatory to do this?

## INTERNAL POLICIES AND BUILDING USE

What new, internal policies might you need as a result of entering into this policy to your church operations? Are there changes to building access or security that you need to consider? For example, do you need to change anything about the way money or keys are handled?

# HOW TO END PARTNERSHIPS WELL

Partnerships won't last forever! Some will be clearly defined in terms of duration – a three-month joint initiative that raises awareness on a particular issue in your local community, for example.

Other partnerships will gain momentum and keep going until either circumstances change significantly, or one of the partners initiates a conversation about whether it is time to make a change.

Realizing that the partnership will end at some point helps prepare you for this likelihood. Ending is not failure! Endings can be done well, celebrating what has been achieved and the relationships that have formed through the partnership.

## HERE ARE SOME WAYS TO RITUALIZE THE END OF A PARTNERSHIP:



Hold a dinner for all those involved, celebrate what was achieved, and mark the end of the partnership.



Create a ribbon cutting for the end of the partnership, to bring it as much gravitas as the beginning.



Hold an awards ceremony and call attention to different things that happened during the partnership.



## EXPLORE GOOD FUTURES

Good Futures Accelerator is a dynamic and proven course that empowers congregations to align money and mission, by exploring how to creatively use their church buildings and property to further their mission and build financial resilience.

## Give us your feedback!

We are always learning and improving our resources.

Scan the code to tell us how this tool worked for you and what changes or improvements you'd like to see in it.



## STAY IN TOUCH!

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