

Looking for a Win-Win Partnership? Look to the University!

An unimaginable wealth of resources is just a phone call away.

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As a nonprofit manager, you face a fact of life not experienced by for-profits: For you, attracting and allocating resources are separate activities. While Home Depot sells products and takes in revenue at the same time, you must attract resources and then, in a separate step, allocate those resources to services that help fulfill your organization's mission.

The paradox, of course, is that the level of services you provide depends on your ability to attract resources. You're trying to stretch the resources you've got while simultaneously attracting more. It's not easy, especially in today's competitive environment. But take heart. Help is close at hand.

In *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, Stephen Covey suggests that the most effective people establish win-win partnerships to realize their desired outcomes. The same is true of nonprofits.

Working with a partner improves each party's understanding of the other, helps identify additional partnership opportunities, and creates a powerful self-fulfilling prophecy. Also, partnerships with highly visible partners may increase your own visibility.

One excellent place to look for win-win relationships is your local college or university. The missions of most colleges favor nonprofit partnering. Consider this excerpt from the mission statement of the University of South Carolina Spartanburg (USCS):

The mission rests upon a foundation of partnerships with the educational, corporate, cultural, and service organizations of the metropolitan Upstate. USCS provides leadership in addressing the Upstate's educational needs and promotes the Upstate's economic and technological development through its curricula, educational outreach, basic and applied research, and professional services.

Since the true win-win relationship fulfills the missions of both partners, colleges make ideal collaborators for nonprofits. They will gladly explore the partnership idea with you, as it represents a chance to show their commitment to public service.

Where Should You Look for Partners?

From the outside, all colleges and universities may look alike. Look deeper, however, and you'll find great diversity. Some are state-assisted, some private, some church-affiliated. All have vastly different missions, faculties, expertise, curricula, services, and facilities.

Clearly, then, it's important to seek out the right college or university partner. Look for one that's compatible not only with your mission but the project you have in mind. Large state flagship universities (University of Wisconsin—Madison, University of South Carolina Columbia), for instance, may be better able to provide technical assistance for extensive, complex research projects (such as a study of mental-health effects of isolation). Small, regional universities may be better suited to applied research (such as a study of how local residents find out about arts programming in their area). A two-year community or technical college may be the best choice for projects of a vocational or technical nature. For example, a technical school may have a graphic arts program that can help create brochures.

What Resources Should You Look for?

Some resources may be available to you at no cost as part of the college's public-service responsibility. Others may be available for a charge or as part of an exchange. These resources include the following:

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Faculty and Administrative Resources

The collective knowledge of faculty and administrators is impressive and may be but a phone call away. Professors are usually required to perform community service. Such service is considered part of their workload, included in their promotion and tenure evaluations. Thus, they're highly motivated to identify opportunities for public service.

Here are a few ways faculty members could help your organization:

- Finance professors could provide investment counseling.
- Accounting professors, or university accountants, could help you select accounting software.
- Marketing professors could undertake a marketing research project for you.
- Professors could study your organization's financial or programmatic operations and recommend changes, savings, internal controls, better publicity, safer practices, and other improvements.
- Faculty members could serve as speakers for banquets or training seminars.
- Faculty can provide direct service for your programs. (For example, a psychologist might work directly with people in a homeless shelter.)
- Professors could serve as expert judges for writing, art, music, and other contests.
- Faculty members may be available to serve as nurses, engineers, coaches, artists, lawyers, accountants, sociologists, historians, writers, auto mechanics, statisticians, and experts in a variety of other fields.
- Financial aid officers, environmental specialists, risk managers, translators, interpreters, career service personnel, counselors, disability service personnel, and other administrative specialists may be able to help your organization.

Another fruitful area is faculty research. There are three types of research which faculty members are

expected to conduct: (1) basic research (discovery of new knowledge), (2) applied research (improving management decision-making), and (3) instructional development (improvements in educational paradigms).

Most research conducted for nonprofit organizations will fall into the first two categories. In partnership with a homeless shelter, for example, professors might study the effects of parental unemployment on children's learning styles. This would be considered basic research. Applied research, on the other hand, might include a study on improving volunteer motivation by increasing reward ceremonies. Both studies could lead to publication.

Student Resources

Students offer a wealth of talent. They undertake community service projects for many reasons:

- Some students have already developed a keen interest in community service. A recent nationwide study of college freshmen found that over 71% performed some community service work in the prior year.
- Many students view community service as improving their marketability.
- Students may participate in projects sponsored by clubs, sororities, and fraternities. Most fraternities and sororities must perform a certain amount of public service to maintain their charters.
- Some faculty members incorporate public service projects into their courses. For instance, they may require students to conduct consumer research in a course on consumer behavior.
- Many colleges and universities require public service activities as part of their graduation requirements.

To arrange for student help, contact the college's internship coordinator, or make arrangements with specific departments. A few examples:

- haircuts by cosmetology students
- tutoring by education majors
- blood pressure checks by nursing majors

- tax preparation by tax majors
- literacy training by liberal art majors
- Web site development by computer specialists
- public service announcements created by communication students.

Receiving skilled personnel at little or no cost is only part of the reward of working with students. You may identify a full-time employee upon the student's graduation. At a minimum, you've exposed the student to the reality of daily life in your organization. Further, you may have found a future volunteer leader.

Physical Resources

Most colleges and universities have facilities available during slow periods, such as vacations, evenings, and weekends. Here are a few possibilities:

- Dorm rooms, classrooms, theaters, auditoriums, gymnasiums, conference rooms, convention centers, dining facilities, parking lots, and child-care centers may be available for use during off-peak times.
- Most institutions have extensive computer facilities including laboratories, downlinks, language labs, science labs, audio-visual equipment, testing labs, and printing services.
- Some colleges and universities have specialized facilities that may include a dairy, air-conditioning and refrigeration repair shop, furniture manufacturing plant, horticulture gardens, and a water testing lab.
- Some institutions maintain private fleets of cars, vans, boats, even aircraft, which you may be able to use.
- Most colleges have printing and copying facilities that rarely work at full capacity 100% of the time. If you're willing to accept a low priority for your work, you may save significantly on your printing and copying needs.

Informational Resources

You can tap into a vast array of informational resources at your local college. These include: books, books on tape, journals, newspapers, maps, catalogs, films, music, databases, indexes, interlibrary loan

arrangements, software, and computers with Internet access.

By reviewing these resources, you're sure to find opportunities for win-win partnerships. For example, the college library may shelve books and other materials for you. In this partnering arrangement, you buy the materials, and the college provides the storage, preservation, and check-out services. Such an arrangement typically serves as a catalyst for other partnerships.

Activity Resources

Universities offer a medley of social and cultural activities, such as lectures, demonstrations, plays, exhibits, concerts, movies, and athletic events. You may be able to partner with a university on such events. You also may find useful ways to participate in college field trips, plant tours, professional association meetings, and professional development seminars.

Clinic and Service Center Resources

Some colleges combine information, physical, faculty, and student resources to form clinics and service centers. Examples include health services, disability services, economic development, art centers, child-care centers, writing centers, tutoring labs, career services, management education, and medical clinics. The telephone directory and catalog listing of offices on campus will help you identify these specialized resources. Look for names such as Center for Economic and Community Development, Office of Business Services, and Center for Management Training and Education.

Proposal and Grant Resources

Another excellent resource is the Office of Sponsored Programs and Research or similarly-named department. Professionals in this department are knowledgeable about funding opportunities. They may have access to on-line information about the latest funding sources. They may sponsor proposal writing workshops in which you can participate. They may help you write proposals or serve as evaluators for your proposals.

The university may also handle the implementation, accounting, and follow-up services of a grant for your organization. Thus, you may be able to obtain a federal grant even if you don't have the resources to administer it if you partner with a university that has such financial administration resources.

Some funders have a preference for partnerships between universities and nonprofit organizations. Clearly, such funding opportunities represent a win-win potential for higher education institutions and nonprofit organizations.

How Can You Create a Partnership?

Here are some tips on finding the best higher-education partner near you:

- Examine the Web sites of area colleges and universities for information regarding their mission, faculties, services, expertise, interests, and facilities.
- Obtain printed promotional materials and telephone directories to learn more about the institution and opportunities for partnership agreements.
- Review the list of personnel included in telephone directories and college catalogs. Sometimes the position titles, departments, degrees held, and professional certifications will spark ideas for partnerships.
- Inquire about open houses and campus tours. These are excellent ways of exploring available resources.
- After an initial open house or tour visit, call for appointments to talk to individuals in areas of interest to your organization.

- If you would like to become a partner in future research grants, make an appointment to meet the sponsored programs and research administrator.

- If you need assistance with a statistical analysis, contact the head of the Statistics Department or the School of Business.

- If you need the use of a facility, contact the facilities manager.

- Consider ways you might exchange resources. Do you, for example, have access to specialized training that you might exchange for summer-time dorm space?

Finding the right fit for your needs may take patience and perseverance, but you'll find it worth the effort.

Don't delay. Go back to school. If you're looking for win-win partners, look to the university! ■

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These publications are available through the Society for Nonprofit Organizations' Resource Center (608-274-9777).

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