

Critical Success Factors

Seven critical factors for the success of the Partnership:

1. Understanding the Multicultural Gaps
2. Tactics for Managing a Successful Partnership
3. Consensus and Decision Making
4. Ongoing Dialog
5. Avoiding Surprises
6. Alignment Between the Main Partners
7. Innovation and Creative Thinking

Success Factor #1: Understanding Multicultural Gaps

In today's global world, one of the most important success factors for a Partnership is to bridge between the various cultures from which the various members of the Partnership originate. There are three main cultural gaps that exist in Partnerships and which need to be bridged:

- The gap between the Israeli culture and that of the community abroad.
- The gap between the culture of the local government and the volunteer culture.
- The gap between the culture of volunteers who donate financial resources and the culture of volunteer who donate other types of resources.

The cultural differences are manifested in three ways:

1. Communication gaps between the original intention of the message and the way in which it is understood by the message receiver.
2. Gaps between methods of decision making.
3. Gaps between methods of implementing decisions.

These gaps should not be viewed as unbridgeable or as a "transparent" issue that the goodwill of the sides will in any case bridge over. At Partnership meetings (and in particular at the initial meetings), it is recommended that these three gaps be related to, by completing a sentence such as, "Our tendency is to..." The best way to deal with intercultural differences involves recognizing their legitimacy and bringing them up for discussion as an integral part of discourse in the Partnership. It should not be the case that one culture is viewed as "the best way" when another is devalued. The goal should be to create a "third culture" that is unique to the Partnership and that works for the Partnership and takes advantage of the best of each culture of the partners.

The gap between Israeli culture and that of the community abroad.

This gap is the most obvious one. According to the accepted stereotypes, there is more initiative in Israel (relative to the communities abroad); there is less planning; there is a rush to get things done (“we will do and then we will listen”) with a minimum of thinking; there is more improvising “as you go”; there is less formality; and less emphasis on cultural nuances. All these should be related to as general characteristics, which under certain conditions contribute to the Partnership and under other conditions hurt it and the achievement of its goals.

The gap between the local (municipal/regional) government’s culture and that of Federation.

This gap is less talked about but more problematic than the previous one. Some of the partners in Israel are local governments with cultural characteristics that are typical of any government organization and are very different from those of the partners abroad who represent the Jewish community. For example, in a government organization in Israel, the hierarchy is well defined and precise, where the head of a local authority has the final word on any issue. The employees are salaried workers in a formal bureaucratic system. The head of the authority is a publicly elected official and represents a party. His decisions are influenced both by his party and by the desire to be reelected to his position.

A Jewish Federation abroad has a clear hierarchy, although sometimes it is somewhat blurred due to the complex relations between volunteers and professionals (in order to be respectful of volunteers who contribute their time and money). The volunteers give of their free time and are not used to receiving instructions or operating according to inflexible bureaucratic rules. Since the Chairperson of the community is chosen but also “volunteered” for the position, he/she is not indebted to a particular party but rather to a group of people that supported him, who are usually a group of his friends from his personal life. The Chairperson of the Federation is usually not concerned about getting reelected.

While a decision can be made in the local government quite easily through voting and without the need for a consensus, among the communities abroad a consensus is critical for the very existence of the community. Maintaining the consensus is sometimes more important than the decision making itself.

The gap between the culture of volunteers who donate financial resources and that of volunteers contributing other types of resources.

In various places in the world, and in particular in the US, volunteers contribute not just time but also money. According to the accepted model in the Jewish world in the US, a volunteer that wants to be selected for a position of importance and influence in the community generally must make a significant donation of money.

In Israel, the involvement of a volunteer is not manifested through a donation of money but rather through a contribution of time, knowledge, involvement, etc.

The Director of a Partnership must know how to bridge the gap between the various types of volunteers and the gap in expectations among the Americans with respect to financial contributions by Israeli volunteers.

Success Factor #2: Tactics for Managing a Successful Partnership

The Partnership is a living and dynamic system and cannot be taken for granted. The system is based primarily on people's goodwill and mutual trust. In addition to the ongoing management of activity in the Partnership, attention should also be paid to nurturing the **interpersonal relations** that characterize the Partnership.

Just as a project needs to be reexamined periodically at pre-determined intervals, the interpersonal relations in a Partnership also require periodic maintenance. Maintenance is manifested in a number of ways:

- a. **Ceremonies:** "Ceremonies" of the Partnership should be planned and implemented. The ceremonies (such as recognition of achievements, festive meeting of the Steering Committee, occasions for paying tribute to volunteers, etc.) that will provide recognition to participants in the Partnership should be planned together and carried out with regularity in order to build trust.
- b. **Milestones:** The planning of any project will include milestones for evaluating the following:
 - The project's results.
 - Whether there is a need for changes in the project or to exit.
 - Whether there is a significant achievement that can be celebrated/ leveraged in order to obtain additional resources and/or goodwill.
- c. **Ongoing Staff Training:** Periodically (for example, once every three years) the Steering Committee members (with or without the subcommittees' members) will meet for the purpose of review and development. The meeting will be devoted to renewing the vision, learning from experience, acquiring tools for project implementation and discussion of the nurturing of the Partnership's relationships. It is important that the meeting not include operative decision making; such decision should be made at regular staff meetings.
- d. **Dialog as a Primary Management Tool:** Ongoing and scheduled dialog, which includes assessing the level of mutual understanding, constitutes a primary management tool for the Partnership.
- e. **Continuous Maintenance of Consensus:** It is worthwhile making decisions based on consensus and to avoid to whatever extent possible decision making by a majority. Differences of opinion should be recognized as legitimate and an effort should be made to find creative solutions that will satisfy the majority. Continually seeking consensus requires time and energy but pays off in terms of nurturing long-term relations.
- f. **Expressing Needs/Representation of all the Communities:** Correct management will include making sure that the communities (in Israel and abroad) feel that the Partnership is providing the appropriate representation of their desires and needs. The Partnership should not just 'do good' but also should 'look good' in the eyes of the various communities. Transparency is extremely important in the management of the Partnership.
- g. **Giving Credit:** In giving credit within a Partnership, one should not have in mind a "zero sum game". It is worthwhile to actively search for opportunities to give credit for good



intentions, for accomplishments and for constructive thinking to as many individuals and entities as possible both inside and outside the Partnership. For example, when beginning a discussion, making a festive speech or providing a review, recognition should be given to as many people and bodies as possible. Similarly, spokesmen of all the sides should be allowed to give greetings, present issues, etc. at Partnership gatherings.

Success Factor #3: Consensus and Decision Making

In volunteer projects, a consensus is an essential tool for recruiting the goodwill of all involved. Since the Partnership is also a goal in and of itself, seeking as broad a consensus as possible is critical.

The process of creating a consensus requires an investment of time, effort and negotiating ability. It is important to understand that the creation of a consensus is not a “linear” process in which there is greater consensus after each “round” (meeting). The creation of a consensus more closely resembles a fan or accordion that is opened and closed. Often, a weakening of consensus is observed and there is less agreement than in the past. This is a natural process and it must be ensured that there will be a convergence towards agreement in the long run.

If there appears to be differences of opinion on points that were already agreed upon in an earlier stage, rather than refusing to recognize them, it is more correct to ask what new information has arisen since the previous stage of agreement which has led to a change in positions.

Nonetheless, if it becomes clear that an honest effort has been made to achieve a consensus but to no avail, then it is important to “cut off the discussion” at some point and to continue forward. The danger of letting the decision making drag on without reaching a consensus lies in the creation of a “veto” culture that will paralyze the Partnership. “Cutting off discussion” means putting the issue to a vote, only after the participants fully understand the issue before them.

Success Factor #4: Ongoing Dialog

The character of the Partnership requires ongoing dialog as an essential management tool. The Director of the Partnership must initiate dialog regarding the Partnership, its goals, objectives, projects and their method of implementation, measures of success, evaluation, personal and organizational values, etc. The management of an effective dialog cannot wait for meetings of the Steering Committees or those of the professional staffs. The Director of the Partnership must initiate dialog on an ongoing basis and not make do with reacting to the initiative of the volunteers or the local government.

Success Factor #5: Avoiding Surprises

There are a number of reasons why the level of sensitivity to surprises is particularly high in a Partnership and therefore it is worthwhile avoiding them.

- **Sectorial Needs:** The Partnership is essentially a conglomerate of (possibly “unofficial”) “representatives” of two or more communities. Such a situation encourages an inter-group dynamic in all its aspects. One of the characteristics of this dynamic is the need of each “representative” to make decisions that can be easily “sold”/marketed when he/she returns



to their community (or when a government employee returns to the government office where he is employed). In such a situation, it is more difficult to make spontaneous decisions since they may not be accepted among one's group of origin.

- **Shared Quality Time:** The geographic distance between partners, the fact that at least some of the representatives travel a long way to get to meetings and the long and valuable time that will pass until the next meeting mandates that each meeting be carried out with maximum efficiency. This efficiency is attained by detailed preparation, which will reduce the risk of surprises, which will waste the time and emotional energy of the partners at the meeting.
- **Intercultural Differences between Partners:** One of the characteristics of Israeli culture is the ability to "think as you go along." In most other cultures, including those of the Partnership communities, this characteristic is viewed as a disadvantage that leads to ineffective meetings. The opposite cultural trait, which is characteristic of the communities from abroad, involves coming to meetings prepared down to the last detail and with the desired results of the meeting already in mind. This intercultural gap often leads to a situation in which the Israeli side unintentionally "surprises" the partners from abroad.

The abovementioned reasons point to the greater importance attributed by the partners to being familiar with the "territory" ahead of time, not to get into speculation and not to be surprised at meetings or in conference calls. In order for discussions to be effective and for wise decisions to be made, the representatives should come to meetings prepared. Therefore, materials, agendas and presentations should be sent out well before the meeting or discussion. The process also requires the inclusion of changes discussed outside the conference room prior to the meeting and also a detailed explanation of the need for the change.

Success Factor #6: Alignment between the Main Partners

Alignment is defined as coordination between the goals of the volunteers and those of the Partnership. The closer the alignment, the more effort will be invested by the volunteers towards the achievements of the Partnership and the Partnership will be more successful in obtaining resources. Alignment is an intangible asset for every Partnership. Raising the level of alignment in a Partnership is one of the objectives of strategic planning.

Partnership Directors, Chairpersons and staff leaders can raise the level of alignment through personal conversations with volunteers and ascertaining their personal needs, beyond simply "Zionist" needs. Questions such as:

- What led you to join the Partnership?
- What would you personally like to gain from the Partnership?
- What gives you satisfaction from your participation in the Partnership?
- When did you feel most benefited or moved by the Partnership?

These are questions that every volunteer coming into the Partnership should be asked and all the volunteers in the Partnership should be asked these questions periodically. In addition, it is



important that such a conversation be held in the appropriate setting –one-on-one and with discretion – and the volunteer should be listened to attentively.

It should be considered that beyond ideology (which is praiseworthy in and of itself) and the values that lead volunteers to join the Partnership, the volunteer also has other needs/goals, which are also legitimate within the framework of the Partnership. The role of an alignment conversation is not to satisfy any specific need of the volunteer, but rather to give these needs a place within the fabric of the Partnership.

Alignment is essentially also a management tool. Just like a car needs a tune-up periodically, so also volunteers need a periodic and initiated alignment.

Success Factor #7: Innovation and Creative Thinking

The Partnership2Gether program is itself an organizational innovation, with few (if any) similar examples in the world. This fact makes the Partnerships into something like a venture capital company in the social realm. This innovation constitutes the contribution of Partnerships to the Jewish People and also their weakness. The contribution of Partnership2Gether is in the development of an “equation” that will serve to answer an acute problem facing the Jewish People. Its weakness is that the proposed solution has not been developed sufficiently and requires particularly high levels of innovation and sensitivity throughout the lifespan of the Partnership. Therefore, the chance of certain failures in the Partnership, as in any social innovation, is high. Paradoxically, the best way to deal with the risk is by taking further small calculated risks. The risks will be innovations that are both creative and implementable. Thus, every Partnership is invited to initiate small and creative changes on a trial and error basis and to introduce local improvements in the Partnership. Some of these experiments will succeed and those should be shared with other Partnerships.