

Understanding Partnership Authorities of the Federal Agencies From: Joint Ventures: Partners in Stewardship Conference, November 2003

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Components of Successful Partnership Agreements

- Nonprofit support partner working under agreement with the NPS, USACE and other nonfederal partners including nonprofit foundations and other local entities.
- We currently have six primary partner relationships, ten retail outlets and a presence in four states. We are on the doorstep of our oldest and most extensive partnership at Jefferson National Expansion Memorial. A few minutes south of us our partnership at Ulysses S. Grant NHS is about to take on a new dimension with the impending completion of a new visitor center. We are just a few miles downstream from our newest budding partnerships at the historic site which is Site #1 on the Lewis & Clark NHT and also the National Great Rivers Museum that just opened at the Melvin Price Locks and Dam, a project of the USACE. Our partnership at Gavin's Point Dam is many miles up the Missouri River and St. Paul, MN is the location of our partnership at Mississippi National River and Recreation Area.
- We operate primarily as a cooperating or interpretive association. In are or have been party to cooperative agreements, cooperating association agreements, partnership agreements, and fund raising agreements.
- For frame of reference only, we have a \$5.5 million dollar budget and \$900,000 to \$1,000,000 in direct and indirect benefit to our partners annually.

While there may be some components of agreements that take on greater significance because of the level of financial exchange that occurs between partners, most components of a successful partnership are universal, and include the following:

1. There must be **COMMONALITY OF MISSION AND PURPOSE**: The partners must share the same goals and be able to work in a complementary fashion. Commonality of mission and purpose is most evident in the preamble of any agreement specifically in the "whereas statements" that provide justification for each partners participation in the agreement. If these introductory statements of purpose in any way contradict a partner's mission, commonality does not exist. Just as the latest lottery winner suddenly become acquainted with the long lost relatives, high profile successful operations often bring out suitors of the unexpected kind. If due diligence suggests a divergence in this most basic component of successful partnering, careful consideration should be given to the validity of the partnering relationship.

"Nothing is troublesome that we do willingly." - Thomas Jefferson

2. There must be a **DEMONSTRATED NEED**. Partnering for the sake of partnering is artificial. Partnerships should always follow as a natural extension of a stated and proven need. They should not precede the need. Resisting such a tendency is challenging in the midst of an organizational climate where the proliferation of partnerships is encouraged. When established partnerships no longer meet a need, they should change or be terminated.

“Never trouble another for what you can do yourself.” - Thomas Jefferson

3. There must be **MUTUALITY AND OPPORTUNITY FOR SUCCESS**. Partnering is not a way to shift, the load of a sure failure to another’s shoulders or to shift responsibility for an unattractive responsibility. It should be a way of ensuring that a primed pump produces water. Risk taking is acceptable if acknowledge from the onset and appropriate steps taken to mitigate the potential snarls. There must be a shared belief that success is possible. The partnership will be stronger if begun with equally portioned risk and the hope of success.

*“We mutually pledge to each other our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honour.”
- Thomas Jefferson*

4. There must be **EQUALITY AND UNITY AMONG PARTIES**. Partnerships are much more art than science and are very dependent upon unwritten components to agreements. They are “eye to eye relationships.” No one has advantage, nor takes advantage. Control is shared. Look for a balance between the rights and responsibilities of both partners. When both come from a position of strength everyone wins. When such clauses are negotiable, give and take must always occur so long as it is not the same partner giving and the other partner always taking. The partners must be able to walk the same goal path together in unity of purpose. It is important to note that unity is not the same as uniformity. When embraced, the differences between partners can deepen the effectiveness of their common work.

“I hope our wisdom will grow with our power, and teach us, that the less we use our power the greater it will be.” - Thomas Jefferson

5. There must be **CLARITY OF ROLES AND EXPECTATIONS**. It is easy to have an accident if you drive on a winding road in the fog. It is critically important to clarify, explain, expound, and describe as much as possible up front. On matters of substance never allow vagaries in language to persist. Obtain an outside review to challenge the clarity of your document. Whenever possible, use plain language.

“Take care that you never spell a word wrong. Always before you write a word, consider how it is spelled, and, if you do not remember, turn to a dictionary.” - Thomas Jefferson

6. There must be **FREEDOM AND FLEXIBILITY**. Partnerships that only see the current need will fail to remain relevant for long. Effective partnerships are forward thinking. Parties must anticipate future developments that may have an impact on the partnership and create a way to address future needs. Although agreements usually define what is allowed, it may also be helpful to set outer limits defining what is out of bounds. With outer limitations in place (usually taking the form of policies, regulations, policy and practical guidance), other actions are acceptable so long as they do not betray the spirit of the agreement.

“I am not an advocate for frequent changes in laws and constitutions, but laws and institutions must go hand in hand with the progress of the human mind.” - Thomas Jefferson

7. There must be a **UNIVERSAL FINANCIAL LANGUAGE**. The financial processes for a non profit organization that must raise its revenues are very different from the processes of appropriated government funding. When differences of opinion surface, they often relate to improperly translated language of finance. It is important to strive to clearly state definitions, expectations, methodology, and formulae regarding the allocations, disbursement and reconciliation of all financial processes that will take place as part of the agreement. If money is to flow between partners, how will it be done, when will it be done, under whose authority will it move and in what amounts? The more significant the amount, the greater the need for a mutual understanding of the financial processes of the other.

“Never spend your money before you have it.” - Thomas Jefferson

8. Finally, although this will not usually find its place in a written agreement it bears stating that there must be a true acceptance that all partnerships require **DILIGENCE AND DEDICATION** to be truly successful. In our line of work, you may be able to take advantage of certain serendipitous circumstances such as premier locations of historical significance or natural beauty, or a built in customer base, but nothing can replace the truth that successful partnerships are always labors of love.

*“I'm a great believer in luck and I find the harder I work, the more I have of it.”
- Thomas Jefferson*