

III: Sustaining the Partnership

Just as important as the actual program your partnership runs is the nonprogrammatic work that enables the partnership to thrive. This work includes developing sources of financial support and creating a cadre of people who will advocate on behalf of the partnership. Central to both of these jobs is effective communication.

Some Notes on Fundraising

Fundraising is a large, complex topic, beyond the scope of this handbook to cover with any thoroughness. Fundraising information, training, and consultants are readily available in most communities throughout the country. For these reasons, we limit our comments here to three suggestions specific to partnerships. In addition, some fundraising resources are listed in Appendices 1 and 2.

- First, seek funding as a partnership, not as an individual arts organization or public school. A collaborative project will appear stronger and more attractive to many funders. It will also provide a new angle for approaching current funders who are experiencing “giving fatigue”—that is, who have been supporting you or your partner for a long time and might stop giving without a new project to keep them interested.

- Second, if at all possible, hire or designate a person who will be responsible for overseeing all fundraising and grant proposal writing. If your partnership has a project director, include this function in that person's job description.
- Third, be sure to coordinate fundraising efforts specific to the partnership with each partner's individual fundraising campaign. Be especially careful that a prospective donor doesn't receive multiple appeals from the partners—you don't want it to appear as though one hand doesn't know what the other is doing.

“*The parents' support helped us decide to put a high priority on rebuilding the arts program here.*”

SCHOOL BOARD MEMBER,
LAS CRUCES, NM,
QUOTED IN *Gaining the
Arts Advantage*

Creating Advocates

Advocacy is a form of support that can get you access to decision makers at various levels and help you obtain grants, in-kind assistance, and possibly even a line in the school or district budget. Begin to develop advocates by identifying potential supporters. Then decide on the most effective way to reach each one. When you approach a potential advocate, you must be able to convey the basic information about your partnership quickly and succinctly: what the partnership is about, who benefits, how they benefit, and why it is important. (See the Talking Points worksheet on page 61 for help in constructing an articulate, clear, concise message.) Although you will be delivering the same message to everyone, the means of delivering it will vary according to the recipient.

Cultivating Parental Support

A critical group to have on your side are the parents of the students your partnership is serving. The following suggestions are adapted from *Involving Parents and Schools in Arts Education: Are We There Yet?*, a publication of the Center for Arts Education's Parents as Arts Partners Program.

Parents have so many demands on their time that getting them involved has proved to be a challenge to public school administrators generally. Since arts education partnerships are different and exciting, they may offer schools a vehicle for reaching out to families and bringing parents into the school community.

From the arts community's perspective, making friends with parents and encouraging them to participate can turn them into the staunchest advocates for arts education in the schools. Here are some ways to involve them:

- **Keep parents in the loop.** Share your vision of the partnership with them. Every child's parents or guardians should receive news of the plans for the partnership ("Your child will be participating in an exciting new program at _____ School ..."), as well as periodic information about what is happening and invitations to student performances and exhibitions.
- **Connect partnership activities to state and federal education standards.** Be certain that you clearly explain and demonstrate these connections to the parents. When older students are involved, make the same connection regarding workplace readiness skills.
- **Design arts activities that include opportunities for discussion at home.** Examples: questions about family history; favorite memories. If you are introducing the students to new vocabulary, send home a list of vocabulary words and definitions.
- **Exhibit the art students create in the halls.** Attach an explanation of what skills each project demonstrates. Consider designating an exhibit area specifically for the partnership.
- **Document activities on videotape to show at PTA or school board meetings.** (Hints: Don't exceed 15 minutes, and use a lot of close-ups.)
- **Offer an opportunity for parents and children to work on art projects together.**
- **Send home notices of arts activities going on in your community,** especially if any of the CSA artists are participating.

Internal and External Communications

As one experienced partner noted, “Isolation is everywhere. The artists and teachers don’t talk to each other; the artists don’t get to talk to each other; and the teachers don’t talk to each other.” To overcome such isolation, Arts Connection, for example, scheduled monthly team meetings with their arts and administrative staff, the teachers, and the principal. Communication leads to relationship building, which leads to shared goals and values, which slowly leads to changes in the cultures of both schools.

Sustaining a partnership requires effective communication both internally, with the people involved in the program itself, and externally, with the CSA board of directors, the public school board, parents, potential funders, the media, and others. It’s a good idea to share the material in this section, especially the Talking Points worksheet, with everyone who may be asked questions about the partnership or who will be communicating with any of the key constituencies.

Written Communications

Two rules should govern all written communications, including press releases, newsletters, and grant applications:

- Do not promise something that you cannot deliver.
- Suit the writing style to the purpose.

Below are suggestions for what types of written communications are needed for the different stakeholders of your partnership.

Whatever writing style you use, it cannot be emphasized enough that spelling counts, as does correct grammar. For every parent,

funder, media person, and administrator who does not notice, there will be another whose impression of the project will be diminished by poor spelling or grammatical errors. If possible, have a third party proofread everything. *Do not* let a poor writer or speller, no matter how willing or well meaning, handle your newsletters, bulletins, or press releases.

The Inner Circle: The Partnership Team— Artists, Teachers, and Key Administrators

Goal: To build cohesiveness among team members and help them get to know one another as individuals and experts in their field.

Frequency: Make a joint decision about what is realistic and stick to it. Do not set a goal of monthly newsletters unless someone with the experience and the time takes on that responsibility. How will the newsletter be distributed? How elaborate will it be? Even if it is just one page, make it attractive, give it a title, and use an eye-catching masthead. If the technology and know-how are available, you may want to create an electronic mailing list for the partnership team to exchange ideas and information. If this is not possible, establish communication exclusively through e-mail.

Contents: Factual information is important. Communicate meeting dates, deadlines, personnel changes, and contact information. Keep the style straightforward and businesslike. Then add a personal element: Did someone get married? Have a baby? Receive an award? Publish an article? Let the team know and tell them where to send cards. For personal information, a less formal style is fine, as is a bit of humor.

The Second Tier: Funders, Advocates, and Potential Supporters

Goal: To build awareness, keep the partnership in their minds, and prime them for when you need their support.

Frequency: Quarterly, semiannually, or when there is important news.

Contents: Include news you want them to hear, especially items that reflect well on the partnership—for example, you’ve achieved a benchmark. Always include information that gives them a feeling of being on the inside. Be sure to highlight items that will interest them personally, such as an upcoming opportunity to increase their own visibility. Report on new initiatives, expanded projects, and new grants or contributions. The style should be straightforward and well-phrased, the format professional.

The Third Tier: Parents and Interested Community Members

Goal: To cultivate friends and community connections.

Frequency: Whenever you have information of interest to them.

Contents: News about their children is of greatest interest to parents, particularly information about upcoming performances or exhibits. Photos of students engaged in a project are always appreciated. (Be aware that you may need parental permission to print photographs of children.) Include partnership news, such as new artists, field trips, and special events. Always include a section detailing what kind of help you need. This may be a request for time, expertise, equipment, or supplies such as old clothes or recycled household items. Use a warm and friendly style, informal but always well written.

Ladder of Effective Communications

FACE-TO-FACE
CONVERSATION

SMALL-GROUP DIS-
CUSSION

E-MAIL/WEBSITES*

TELEPHONE CON-
VERSATION

HANDWRITTEN
LETTER

TYPEWRITTEN
PERSONAL LETTER

VIDEOTAPE

MASS-PRODUCED
LETTER

NEWSLETTER

BROCHURE

E-MAIL/WEBSITES*

NEWS ITEM

ADVERTISEMENT

Ladder of Effective Communications

Whether you are trying to raise funds or make friends, communication is key. You may sometimes feel that you are advocating for your program one person at a time. The secret is to find the *right* person—one who can open doors to others and help spread the word. There is a multitude of ways to reach out to people, and different methods are most effective in different contexts. The “ladder” in the sidebar, adapted from Howe’s *The Board Member’s Guide to Fund Raising*, ranks forms of communicating by effectiveness.

The basic principle of the ladder is that in every aspect of building support, you must strive to carry out any activity at the highest level. Whether you are trying to interest a single person or a whole community, your chance of success is greater at a higher rung.

The Board Member’s Guide tells us that, “for example, if you want to introduce your organization and stimulate interest, a [good] videotape is better than a written brochure, and a direct discussion is better than a video. If you are cultivating prospective contributors, small groups will lead to greater success than larger ones. Direct discussion is more effective than a letter, no matter how personal and persuasive the letter may be.”

* The rank order of electronic media (e-mail and websites) varies in different communities, so it’s important to find out what the user patterns are in your locality. In some communities e-mail and website use is near the top of the list, while in others—at least for the moment—these media might be near the bottom, at least among some parents or caregivers.

Worksheet 9: Talking Points

On occasion you will be asked point-blank why your arts education partnership is worth pursuing. Your response should be unhesitating and articulate. For most people, the ability to respond this way requires thinking out what to say in advance and then practicing it. Presumably, if you have participated in the partnership planning process, the answers are clear in your mind. Even so, it may be helpful to use this worksheet to practice and refine your response to the question "Who benefits and how?"

The quotes below are from participants in Family Arts and Creativity, a program of the Institute for Arts and Humanities Education, and from *Gaining the Arts Advantage*, published by the President's Committee on the Arts and Humanities and the Arts Education Partnership.

Benefits for Students

"I learned that you can do anything you put your mind to."

Fourth-grader

- Education experts have found that different people learn better using different senses (the theory of multiple intelligences). Incorporating the arts into learning gives students the chance to approach new information in many ways: verbally, visually, and through hearing and touch.
- When students learn arts skills, they become involved in an ongoing process of self-evaluation and improvement. Studying a musical instrument, for example, will teach a student to focus, interpret, polish, and concentrate in order to achieve a goal.
- A report issued by the Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills of the U.S. Department of Labor (the SCANS report) concluded that the arts are important for developing skills and qualities that are essential for succeeding in the workplace, such as self-esteem, problem solving, creative thinking, exercising individual responsibility, and sociability.
- The Educational Testing Service observed in 1998 that students who had studied the arts for four or more years outscored those who had studied the arts for six months or less by a combined total of 82 points on the verbal and math portions of the SATs.

Additional benefits:

Benefits for Teachers

"I am more likely to use arts across the curriculum and more accepting of multiple intelligences and alternative learning styles."

Classroom teacher

- Teachers learn new methods that help them reach out to a wider range of students.
- The new types of training that teachers receive in arts programs often send them back to the classroom newly invigorated. Discovering innovative ways of presenting material helps keep their jobs interesting.
- Teachers who lack confidence in their ability to create an arts experience discover the artist within themselves.

Additional benefits:

Benefits for Families

“I never think I’m artistic, but when we just start creating, something magical happens!”

Parent

- Parents become more aware of how their children learn.
- Working on an art project together gives a parent and child a new way to communicate.
- Families discover new things they can do together, such as visiting a museum or attending a performance.
- Parents get the chance to have arts experiences of their own.

Additional benefits:

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Benefits for Public School Administrators

“It is often parental pressure that has persuaded the district to fund full-time positions in the arts.”

Principal

- Arts programs offer many opportunities to draw parents and community members into the school.
- The partnering teachers become much more motivated and excited about their work.
- Professional artists coming into the school help it meet state and federal standards in the arts.
- Funding opportunities are available for collaborative and innovative programs.

Additional benefits:

Benefits for the Community at Large

- Bringing an arts partnership to their local schools enables community members to have a positive impact on these schools.
- Connections among the CSA personnel, public school personnel, local businesspeople, and community organizations have tangible positive impacts on the community and lead to civic pride.
- Innovative and exciting schools enhance real estate values.

Additional benefits:
