

I: What Is a Partnership?

“*A partnership is a relationship between individuals or groups that is characterized by mutual cooperation and responsibility, for the achievement of a specified goal.*”

JANE REMER,
Beyond Enrichment

Why Partner?

When you listen to CSA and public school staff who have created successful partnerships, you understand why it's worth all the time and effort. They tell of children who begin to see visiting CSA faculty members as *their* musicians; of CSAs that pointedly hire faculty with a variety of ethnic backgrounds; and of public schools that vastly broaden their approach to learning. They describe a process that begins with some resistance, develops into acceptance, and matures into recognition, bringing profound, lasting changes. Institutions and individuals both develop new, positive attitudes toward the arts and toward themselves.

A CSA, then, has both practical and philosophical reasons for partnering. The school becomes a recognized, important part of the educational ecology in a community while also reaping the rewards of helping develop a community of learners in and through the arts. If a CSA can fulfill its own mission while also providing in-depth, high-quality arts learning for other children within local public schools, everyone wins.

Perhaps even more than performing or visual arts organizations, CSAs can have a comprehensive influence on K–12 education. Noting that communities need to be involved in improving schools, Craig Dreeszen, former Director of the Arts Extension Service at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, suggests that CSAs can help in these ways:

- Improving the quality of arts learning
- Improving students' academic performance (for example, by increasing cognitive awareness and ability to focus)
- Designing sequential arts curricula (that is, in which students can start as beginners and proceed to a high level of skill)
- Providing quality professional development for teachers, community leaders, and artists
- Giving students the skills to succeed in the twenty-first century, such as self-discipline, breadth of perspective, and tenacity

As permanent members of their neighborhoods, CSAs also offer sustained contact with teachers and students. CSAs can reach out to their community by giving public school students and teachers, as well as their own teaching artists, opportunities to perform and exhibit. Such outreach can have a significant impact. Though many CSAs are highly valued by the children and adults who study there (and perhaps by their family members), the rest of the community is often unaware of them—a situation that maintains the separation between the arts and the rest of society. Partnering with a local public school helps integrate the CSA into its community.

What Is a Partnership?

Partnering is not the same as cooperating or collaborating. Responses to a 2001 National Guild survey indicated that at least 60 percent of our member schools were engaged in partnerships with public schools, and many of their programs offered ongoing, sequential instruction. Closer inspection, however, often revealed that the public schools were simply selecting programs from an existing list designed by the CSA. While these programs were

More Reasons for Partnering:

- ▶ To fill a gap in the public school's curriculum
- ▶ To “shake things up” in the public school or in the CSA
- ▶ To challenge the CSA faculty to attain new heights
- ▶ To provide additional employment for CSA instructors
- ▶ To become a greater resource for the community

usually described as having been tailored to meet the public school's needs (and, in fact, were sometimes developed in response to a request), rarely was there any joint curriculum planning or reciprocal professional development for artists and classroom teachers.

Equally rare was CSA involvement in integrating the arts into the broader curriculum. Nor was there generally much evidence of attention being paid to national or state core curriculum standards. Often, the CSA took full administrative and financial responsibility. In short, the CSA determined both process and content and provided a service which the public school simply purchased as a package.

Such “service provider” arrangements may be considered a form of partnership, and they do work well for many CSAs. They fulfill students' needs, provide income for the CSA, and make it possible to extend faculty contracts, while also offering access to new audiences—all valuable benefits. However, these primarily one-sided arrangements do not take full advantage of the expertise of both the artists and the educators to create in-depth, pedagogically sound arts experiences for children and professional enrichment for teachers and artists. What is more, true buy-in from the school, and particularly from the teachers, tends to be minimal. For these reasons, the Partners in Excellence Initiative suggests that you consider taking the next step into a true partnership.

“Ecological” Partnerships

Craig Dreeszen uses the term “ecological partnership” to describe an arrangement that creates closer interconnections among participants. An ecological partnership involves a clearly stated and shared mission, mutual goals, cooperative planning and management, clearly delineated roles, mutual respect and understanding, reciprocal professional development, and ongoing evaluation that results in modifications in the program. At its best, an ecological partnership has a major impact on the educational perspective of both partners

that, over time, changes the culture of each organization. And as its name suggests, the partnership frequently extends beyond the primary partners to include other arts organizations, arts councils, parents, local businesses, and funders.

Partnership Basics

An ecological partnership may not be realistic for every CSA, but regardless of the scope and depth of the collaboration, certain partnering principles remain important. The Partners in Excellence Initiative identified five foundations of successful partnerships that are critical for success:

- **Keep your focus on the students.** Setting learning goals and planning how to meet them comes first. Keeping students at the center will also result in fewer turf battles.
- **Agree on your expectations about partnership structure, anticipated outcomes, and responsibilities.** Program staff and evaluators must also begin the evaluation process with an agreement about what should be evaluated and how the information will be used.
- **Trust is essential.** Public school teachers and CSA teaching artists must trust one another, while children and teachers need to feel safe enough to take creative risks. As one artist put it, “Trust is about building a relationship with the strangers who come into the house.” Another called trust “the basis for a safe space.”
- **All parties must fully commit.** CSA leadership and faculty, as well as public school teachers and administrators, must share a commitment to the program. This also means committing to advocating for the partnership and for arts education in general.

Important Partnership Principles

- ▶ **Involve parents and local community organizations.** Community involvement encourages new relationships, develops advocates for arts education, and increases awareness of the community school as a resource.
- ▶ **Consider working with a local university.** Their expertise in professional development and teacher training, as well as evaluation and assessment, can contribute greatly to your ability to build a sustainable partnership.
- ▶ **Plan curriculum jointly.** The resulting program will be more educationally relevant for the children and more likely to promote follow-up from the classroom teacher.

- **Expect a substantial investment of time.** Partnerships often require a greater investment of time than doing a project or program alone. In addition to allowing time for the teaching itself, you will need to allow time to plan, reflect, coordinate, and build relationships. Partnership projects often unfold more slowly than projects undertaken single-handedly. When one conference participant commented that a three-year National Endowment for the Arts grant had provided time to develop and refine a program, another observed that three years is not long enough—that it takes ten years to develop a real comfort level, so that the partnership does not depend on specific individuals to function.

Determining Structure and Focus

Once you have decided to create a partnership, you need to address two other basic questions before beginning your planning.

- What structure will the partnership take?
- What will its focus be?

The choices you make about structure and focus are not as important as making sure that each partner clearly understands and agrees about them. Determining the partnership's structure and focus at the outset will help ensure shared expectations.

STRUCTURE

The *structure* of your partnership defines how the partners work together. Deciding who the partners should be is essential. The CSA may partner with a single school or an entire district. Other organizations, such as museums, libraries,

recreation departments, universities, and performing arts presenters, as well as independent artists, may be involved in the activities. Are they best defined as *collaborators*, who will help deliver instruction, provide a specific service, or lend their venue, or as *full partners*, who will take on equal responsibility for planning, managing, implementing, and evaluating the work?

The *time frame* of the partnership is a critical part of its structure. You need to decide how long the partnership will last. Will the partners conduct a specific short-term project together, or will they establish an ongoing, comprehensive relationship?

FOCUS

The partnership's *focus* refers to the intended audience or target population. Your program may be age or grade specific. It may have geographic boundaries—for example, all students attending school in the northern section of the city. Or it may be focused entirely on enabling teachers and artists to improve their skills. It could be limited to a single art form or be a multidisciplinary effort.

The Evolution of Successful Partnerships

David E. Myers has described how an ongoing partnership matures into success and sustainability.

- In the initial planning stage, the partners agree on what the partnership is about, keep the focus on student learning, and fulfill the responsibilities they have undertaken.
- True collaboration—involving mutual regard, reciprocity of ideas, and recognition of each other's strengths and limitations—develops between teachers and artists as they work together.
- As the partnership matures, the existing collaboration deepens as the partners acknowledge the difficulties inherent in maintaining a partnership, recognizing that change is inevitable and not something to be feared.

Success Story: 1

Very different types of partnerships can be equally successful, as the examples of TRACE and the Arts Connection (next page) demonstrate.

TRACE, The Trident Regional Arts Collaborative Endeavor (TRACE), in Moncks Corner, South Carolina, is a multilegged partnership under the sponsorship of an umbrella organization. It involves three school districts and five arts organizations, including Spoleto USA and the Gibbes Museum of Art. In existence since 1993, it serves 3,500 third graders and involves nearly 200 music, art, and classroom teachers. With a focus on school change, it emphasizes staff development. Children have access to teacher-developed, arts-infused lessons. TRACE attributes its success to the fact that the arts lessons are not an add-on but help the teachers achieve existing learning goals by developing students' basic skills (critical thinking, for example).

Success Story: 2

ARTS CONNECTION, in New York City, has had a partnership with the Basheer Qusim school (grades K–5) in the South Bronx since the late 1980s. The program, Thematic Arts Seasons, includes semester-long, multidisciplinary, thematically related arts activities, with an instructional sequence and materials targeted to specific grades. Five hundred students and 50 teachers are involved. Arts Connection Deputy Education Director Carol Morgan feels that their mission is to create a culture of learning, including learning how to ask questions. Despite its longevity, the partnership is still viewed as being in formation.

- The partnership demonstrates that aesthetic values can become part of the culture of the public school.
- One goal of a sustained partnership is to build a community of learning for arts education. Partners document their program extensively and use student assessments in determining how to improve the program. Evaluation, an integral part of the partnership compact, includes all dimensions of the program: quality of teaching, artistic quality, teacher and artist growth, and the level of partner commitment and interchange.

The worksheets on the following pages will enable you to review your reasons for organizing a partnership and to analyze and discuss two case study vignettes. Working through them with your partner will lead to insights that will help you create a successful, satisfying partnership.

Worksheet 2: Two Partnership Vignettes for Study and Discussion

Courtesy of David E. Myers, Ph.D.

Ms. Sang and the Happy Valley CSA

Ms. Sang, a local high school choral director, has approached the Happy Valley CSA about a partnership. She needs someone to teach voice lessons to her students two afternoons a week, and is hoping the CSA can provide a teacher at a low fee. Her primary (unspoken) motivation is that the choir has not been doing well in festivals and, as a trombone major, she is not really sure how to improve things. Her principal has indicated that he may be requesting a new teacher next year.

The CSA director has been thinking about developing a partnership with the school, but his ideas go beyond voice lessons. He initiates a meeting with the choral director and the principal, where he proposes that artists from Happy Valley could teach elective classes for any students interested in learning the basics of singing and music theory. (He hopes that such classes will generate more private voice students for Happy Valley.) The principal explains that classes must be taught by licensed teachers, but suggests that CSA teaching artists could give private lessons for a modest fee in the practice rooms adjacent to Ms. Sang's choir room. He would like to open these lessons to any interested student, in hopes of building both the numbers and quality of Ms. Sang's choir.

When informed about these conversations, the music supervisor points out that schoolday instruction cannot discriminate against students who cannot afford to pay. He questions whether the Happy Valley instructors know how to work with high-school students. The music supervisor has recently been arranging for a local opera company to present some opera scenes in the high school, and he wonders whether this could connect with the voice lessons. Though nothing so far proposed seems workable, everyone has been awakened to the possibility of more school–community interactions around vocal music.

Questions to consider:

What is each party's stated motivation for becoming partners?

What are the actual motivations of the teacher, principal, music supervisor, and CSA director?

Where are their goals congruent? Where do they conflict?

As the facilitator to this partnership, what might you propose in order to satisfy everyone's needs?

Mountain School of the Arts and ArtsBelong

Funded by a major foundation, a local partnership that brings visual artists, dancers, musicians, and actors into schools has garnered the attention of the national press. ArtsBelong, a nonprofit coalition of arts-interested individuals and groups, manages the partnership. This coalition is now seeking additional support from local foundations and corporations. Thanks to a successful public relations campaign, a number of big-name funders are showing interest. A recent evaluation by a prestigious research university concluded that the arts program was contributing to improved academic performance for all children.

Recently, the partnership approached the Mountain School of the Arts about conducting professional development workshops for the artists. Mountain School is interested but would also like to involve some of its own teaching artists in the program.

To understand the partnership better, the Mountain School of the Arts executive director visited the program. To her dismay, she discovered that, while teachers and children enjoyed the artists' visits, there was no evidence of mutual planning or instruction. Arts lessons frequently failed to engage children beyond low-level tasks, and the artistic quality was uneven. Classroom teachers had been trained to do integrated arts activities, but they still felt uncomfortable doing them. Most of the time, therefore, they did not try to do these activities and, when they did, the quality was often very weak.

Artists were making many unilateral instructional and curriculum decisions without any collaboration with classroom teachers or arts specialists. The curriculum connections were mostly superficial and spurious, and arts specialists resented the fact that the artists' visits had no relationship with the schools' sequential arts programs. What was more, several principals, believing that the visiting artists program provided sufficient arts education, had reassigned employee points to release arts specialists and hire more grade-level teachers. Meanwhile the artists complained that the schools had not embraced them to the extent necessary to have true impact.

There are big dollars available, and by participating, the Mountain School of the Arts stands to gain visibility and increased registration. However, no one seems to be holding the bottom line on the quality of the classroom work. School and ArtsBelong administrators are portraying a successful program to funders, and the partnership is being hailed as a national model in arts education.

Questions to consider:

What are the issues?

What are the strengths and weaknesses of the program as it exists?

What are the pros and cons of the Mountain School of the Arts getting involved?

If the MSA executive director wishes to pursue this project, what steps should she take first in order to have any chance of meeting her artistic goals?

What is the CSA's role in ensuring artistic integrity in all programs it undertakes?

What do you think ArtsBelong's role should be?