



Effective Partnerships for Soroptimist Clubs

What is a partnership?

Partnerships can take a variety of forms and range from networking (sharing information to benefit all partners) to working together to develop a new project. Partnerships are relationships that involve close cooperation between parties having specified and joint rights and responsibilities. Effective partnerships are characterized by mutual cooperation and responsibility to achieve a goal.

Soroptimist clubs have partnered successfully around the world with local organizations, local affiliates of international organizations and other Soroptimist clubs. However, other organizations often approach Soroptimist clubs as a source of funding or other support for their existing programs. This does not always qualify as a “partnership.” In order to increase name recognition for Soroptimist—an organization of business and professional women who work to improve the lives of women and girls—clubs need to ensure that when they work with organizations, it is a true partnership: one that advances the Soroptimist mission and in which the Soroptimist club is a recognized partner. This document is a short guide to help clubs form effective and successful partnerships.

Soroptimist clubs are resourceful and inventive at addressing the issues confronting women and girls in their communities. Soroptimist clubs can, by themselves, work on and solve these issues. But sometimes, the club wants to address issues but does not feel qualified to undertake the needed action. Sometimes other organizations are already working on the topic. Sometimes those organizations need help. When this happens, clubs should consider partnering.

Why should clubs partner?

- Partnering can enable the club to tackle an issue it is interested in but does not have the expertise to address on its own.
- The problem may be too complex for the club to adequately address.
- Partnerships can enable the club to reach a larger audience and accomplish work it could not have done alone.
- Partnerships can make better use of resources and enable the partners to deal more effectively and thoroughly with an issue. This includes sharing expenses associated with marketing and advertising.
- Soroptimist clubs can increase the number of organizations that are aware of and working on issues affecting women and girls.
- A project can gain credibility by having credible groups and partners associated with it.
- Partnerships can help the club to achieve its mission more cost effectively.

What are some of the drawbacks of partnering?

Partnerships could have drawbacks. Three common drawbacks of partnering include:

- **Inequality:** This can take many different forms and can include one partner devoting more financial or human resources to the partnership than the other. It can also occur if one partner is more committed to the project than the other.
- **Lost Identity:** The club has to be careful to ensure that Soroptimist is strongly identified with the partnership. A stronger or better-known partner could overshadow the club. The club’s ability to achieve its mission, attract members and raise funds is based on its unique identity.
- **Time-consuming:** The club could invest valuable time trying to make a partnership work and not see tangible results.

What are the steps to a successful partnership?

1. Identify the issue or project in which the club is interested.
2. Identify other organizations that are working on the issue or might be interested in the issue.
3. Identify what the club can bring to the partnership and what it would like from the partner.
4. Identify what the club wants to get from the partnership beyond just helping women or girls (for example, attracting members, media attention or funds).
5. Determine which club members will be responsible for the partnership. Include multiple members as the responsibility should not rest with just one or two engaged members.
6. Investigate and approach possible partners to gauge interest.
7. Negotiate and agree on desired outcomes and expectations.
8. Determine methods of evaluation and schedule periodic evaluations.

How can a successful partnership be ensured?

The two most essential qualities of a successful partnership are clearly defined expectations and ongoing communication. The following will help to ensure success:

- **Defined Expectations and Outcomes:** The roles, responsibilities and goals of the partners should be negotiated. After negotiations, draft a written agreement that includes clearly stated outcomes, roles, responsibilities and resource allocations. All parties need to understand expectations concerning tasks, responsibilities and accountability. (See sample beginning on page 3.)
- **Communication:** Plans for multiple forms of communication that keep all the stakeholders informed. Maintain frequent and open communication and include opportunities for face-to-face meetings. Remember, the agreement will include a clear vision of the expected outcome. Communicate that vision regularly.
- **Shared Values and Commitment:** The leadership of both organizations needs to believe in the partnership and have buy-in from all levels of the organization. This is necessary for two reasons. First, the more people involved in the partnership, the more successful it will be. Second, every organization and club has turnover. Therefore, the responsibility for the partnership should not rest with just a couple of individuals. Everyone involved needs to share a commitment to a common vision, and the relationship should be based on trust and integrity.
- **Know the Partners:** Understand the structure, mission and activities of possible partners. It isn't necessary that all organizations have the same mission but there should be shared values. Review the partner's annual report. Speak to organizations it has partnered with in the past and ask to see evaluations of past projects.
- **Equality:** Both partners need to be involved in the planning and execution of the project. When one partner is more invested than the other, competition can become an issue. The best partnerships will employ the strengths of each partner. But the costs and the benefits to both partners must be equal.
- **Flexibility:** Both partners should recognize that mistakes will happen and changes will have to be made in order to keep the partnership functioning. Scheduling time to occasionally evaluate the process can help to keep the partnership running smoothly. An exit strategy or a way to end the relationship if it isn't working should be part of the plan.
- **Define Success:** Know how the club will define success at each step of the partnership. Share the successes with all stakeholders early and often.

Post Partnership

Once the partnership has ended, it should be evaluated, just as the club would do for a program. In order to continue to grow and be successful, record what worked, what didn't and what could be done differently in the future.

Sources:

National Council of Nonprofit Associations. Partnerships Toolkit. www.ncna.org.
BoardSource. Making Nonprofit Partnerships Effective. www.boardsource.org.

Sample Partnership Agreement

An agreement ensures that the expectations of both partners are understood and met. The following is just a sample of what might be included. The agreement should be negotiated by both partners and reflect what the partners have agreed to do. Each partner should keep a copy of the agreement.

Soroptimist International of Anytown and The Women's Crisis Center enter into this agreement on November 15, 2008, to work together on the project entitled Skills to Rebuild: Providing Women with Computer Skills.

SI of Anytown agrees to:

1. The goals and objectives outlined in the project proposal dated October 30, 2008.
2. Protect the confidentiality of the clients of the Women's Crisis Center (WCC).
3. Provide WCC with \$2,000 on or before December 15, 2008 for the purchase of updated computer equipment and other needed supplies for the computer classroom.
4. Work with WCC staff on designing the curriculum for the classes to be completed by January 15.
5. Provide teachers and proctors on the first and third Tuesday of each month for the classes for six months beginning in February 2009.
6. Mention the partnership and the project on the club website and in any publications created during the duration of the partnership.
7. Handle public relations. The SI of Anytown public awareness chair is responsible for the distribution of all press releases and media alerts. Materials will be developed in cooperation with WCC. Both partners must approve all contact with the media. The public awareness strategy will include a minimum of three press releases to at least four newspapers. In addition, members of both organizations will be available for radio and TV interviews.

The Women's Crisis Center agrees to:

1. The goals and objectives outlined in the project proposal dated October 30, 2008.
2. Provide \$2,000 for the purchase of updated computer equipment and other needed supplies for the computer classroom.
3. Work with SI of Anytown on designing the curriculum for the classes to be completed by January 15.
4. Provide teachers and proctors on the first and third Tuesday of each month for six months beginning in February 2009.
5. Mention the partnership and the project on the organizational website and in any publications created during the duration of the partnership.
6. Produce and copy all materials needed for the project.
7. Provide the tools and evaluation of the program. All evaluations and reports will be completed by September 1, 2009.

Communication

1. SI of Anytown and WCC agree to attend regularly scheduled meetings and participate in conference calls to assess the project's progress. The meetings will take place on the fourth Monday of each month at 9:00 a.m. The calls will include the president and program chair of SI of Anytown and the WCC executive director and program director. Additional members or staff are welcome.
2. Two members of SI of Anytown will attend the WCS board meetings monthly to communicate with board members on the project's progress.
3. Two WCC members will attend a monthly SI of Anytown meeting to communicate about the project's progress.

Evaluation

1. Using an evaluation developed by WCC, the program will be appraised at the end of each month. WCC will conduct a more thorough evaluation of the goals at the conclusion of the project.
2. In addition to evaluating the goals and objectives at the conclusion of the project, SI of Anytown and the WCC will also meet to evaluate the partnership.
3. SI of Anytown and The Women's Crisis Center will each grant to the other a non-exclusive, limited, worldwide royalty-free license to create and establish a hypertext link on their respective websites. Both

acknowledge that their respective websites are proprietary to them; are protected under copyright and other intellectual property laws; and may not be reproduced, transmitted, displayed, published, or distributed without their respective written consents.

The relationship will remain between SI of Anytown and The Women's Crisis Center; any contact or arrangement with individual Soroptimists or staff member at WCC must be cleared through the Soroptimist club president. Either party may end this agreement at any time without cause by giving the other party 30 days prior written notice. Upon the expiration or termination of this agreement, both parties will remove all links from their respective websites.

This partnership is between SI of Anytown and the Women's Crisis Center. It has been discussed and agreed to by the staff and boards of both organizations. In the event of a change of president or executive director, the agreement will continue under the direction of the new leadership.

Throughout the duration of this agreement, neither SI of Anytown nor The Women's Crisis Center will use the other party's name, logo, or trademarks without prior written approval. All press releases relating to the partnership will be released jointly.

Name of SI of Anytown president _____

Signature of SI of Anytown president _____

Date _____

Name of Women's Crisis Center Executive Director _____

Signature of Women's Crisis Center Executive Director _____

Date _____