
How to Partner with Local Community Organizations

Yes we can!

Use these tools to help your group identify and successfully collaborate with community organizations that can help you reach your goals.

A **How-to Guide** for neighborhood leaders working to make life better for people in Battle Creek



How to Partner with Local Community Organizations

Organizations in our community like schools, churches, businesses and nonprofit groups can play a key role in making or breaking the efforts of your group to reach its goals. They may bring real resources like money or skills to your efforts if they are partners, or they can become obstacles to your success if they are not.

Why should your group work with partner organizations?

Partner organizations can bring important resources to your effort:

- Real resources such as funding to help purchase things that the group needs like paper for flyers, food for volunteers or other supplies.

- In-kind resources like copying, phone calling, or meeting space or other facilities.
- Information about the problem the group is working on or examples of solutions other groups or organizations have successfully used.
- Skills are also resources. Sometimes organizations have trained staff who can skillfully facilitate meetings, design eye-catching flyers, make media contacts or do other jobs your group needs help with.
- Credibility is a resource, too. Sometimes, neighborhood groups just need someone else to understand their cause and help them be heard by other community organizations—or to introduce them to other groups who are interested in the same things.

What can your group do to find partner organizations?

1. Make sure your group knows what you are working toward. Have a plan of action that clearly shows what steps and resources you need to reach your goals. What resources

does your group already have? Consider things like energy and excitement, a deep understanding of an issue, volunteers and relationships with others. What resources do you still need?

2. Come up with a list of community organizations that might care about your project or the issue it is designed to address. Organizational leaders in our community say that they must carefully choose to work on projects that meet the mission of their organization because their resources are limited. Include in this list the resources you think those organizations might be able to contribute. See the Potential Partners chart on the back page for a sample of what your list might look like.
3. Before talking to representatives of the organizations on the list, think about what's in it for them. Again, organizational leaders in our community have said that they must believe there will be some visible result from the partnership efforts and that they must feel confident that there will be some future benefit to their organization or to the community. Include these reasons for their partnership on your list as well.
4. Choose a spokesperson from your group to talk to the organizational leader. It helps if the person you choose has some relationship with that organization already. For example, if you are hoping a school will contribute some meeting space for your group, you might choose a parent whose child attends the school or better yet, a member of the school's PTA.
5. Practice your "pitch" if needed. Help your spokesperson feel that they can speak confidently about your group's purpose, your plan, your needs and why it benefits the organization to partner with you. Then you are ready to call and make your appointment!





Once you have an organizational partner, how can you make sure your partnership works well for all?

Once you have your partners lined up, making the most of your partnership for the long term also takes some time and energy. Like all good relationships, some thinking and talking ahead of time can save lots of conflict and misunderstandings down the road, especially if you hope to work with the organization on future projects.

Successful partnerships reach common goals and get things done. Here's how:

- Sit down with representatives from the organization and make sure everyone understands what goals or results are hoped for. Does your group or the organization really have control over whether or not the goals can be reached? How will you know whether you have reached your goals?
- Work together to come up with a timeline or an action plan that meets everyone's needs as much as possible.
- When you partner, you must believe you are responsible for one another's success—and failure!

Successful partnerships use resources effectively. Here's how:

- Before your project starts, be clear about who is providing what.
- Make sure your organizational partner understands how their contributions will be used.
- Clarify any “non-negotiables” either partner may have about limits on resource use or circumstances under which resources cannot be used.

Successful partnerships build relationships. Here's how:

- Partners share decision-making equally.
- Partners are straightforward and honest, especially when problems come up.
- Partners agree on realistic expectations for roles and responsibilities ahead of time.
- Partners follow through on commitments and promises.
- Partners share credit for success (and share responsibility for shortfalls).

Successful partnerships establish clear roles for each group and individual. Here's how:

- Be clear about each partners' roles and responsibilities as well as expectations and needs. This means your group will have to understand its own abilities, strengths and needs ahead of time.
- Partners must follow through on commitments in a timely way.
- Share responsibility for completing joint tasks.

Successful partnerships make decisions fairly and communicate clearly. Here's how:

- Decisions are made with the needs and interests of both organizations in mind.
- Capture key decisions from meetings and make sure everyone has a copy in a timely manner.
- Open, honest communication is very important.
- Agree on a communication system for keeping one another updated on progress or issues that arise.

Yes we can!

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A Successful Community Partnership in Battle Creek

The Washington Heights (Hubbard Street) Community House has several organizational partners working with their committee of neighborhood residents to make successful change happen in the neighborhood. Besides the Girls Scouts, the Battle Creek Police Department and Neighborhoods Inc., the Community House partners with the Family Health Center to provide a weekly medical clinic at the House. The Health Center provides blood pressure checks, blood sugar testing, immunizations and other basic medical services and the neighbor group provides comfortable, accessible space in the neighborhood, volunteer support for clinic staff and help getting the word out to the neighborhood about the services that are available. Everyone benefits and things get done for the neighborhood!

Local Resources

The NonProfit Alliance—can help your group identify nonprofit organizations, their mission and interests, and the resources they may be able to share. 968-8166 ext. 541

The Coordinating Council—represents all of the human service organizations in Calhoun County and can also help your group identify organizational interests and resources. 441-5904

The Battle Creek Area Chamber of Commerce—represents area businesses. 962-4076

Feel free to share this guide with friends and neighbors. Call 269-969-2228 for additional copies and for other guides on a variety of how-to topics.

Potential Partners List

Potential Partner Organization			
Resources they might provide			
Why they might partner			
Who we know at this organization			
Who will contact them			
Contact information			

Yes we can! is a collaboration among Battle Creek residents and organizations working to help kids achieve in school and build a solid economic future for the people of our community. Yes we can! is funded by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation.

For general questions about Yes we can!, call 269-969-2228 or visit www.wkkf.org/yeswecan. To apply for a mini-grant to support your neighborhood or community project in Battle Creek, call the Battle Creek Community Foundation at 269-962-2181.

Yes we can!