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Successful organisations build strong relationships and partnerships, particularly in the community sector where resources can be scarce.

Why are strong relationships important?

1. **Sharing knowledge** – Community organisations do not usually have large management teams, with wide ranging experience and knowledge. Sharing knowledge with others is one way of making best use of the resources you have.
 2. **Fundraising** – Maintaining good relationships with funders, donors and sponsors will help you to better plan and manage your fundraising activities. They will understand your organisation and you will better understand their priorities and constraints.
 3. **Complementary services and referrals** – If you work in the same sector, or for the same people, it is important to understand services that others provide. You can then confidently refer your clients to additional services and also ensure you do not waste resources competing with existing services.
 4. **Peer support** – Having someone you can talk to about challenges you might be facing, or about ideas you have for your organisation is invaluable. Knowing you have someone at the end of the phone can help when things get tough.
 5. **Sharing resources** – Developing partnerships or collaborating on projects is a good way to share resources to offer your client base enhanced services.
 6. **Challenges** – When you have challenges people are more likely to help if you have a strong relationship.
 7. **Stakeholders** - Managing strategic relationships that can have a major influence over the ongoing sustainability and success of your organisations is key and is a whole team effort
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Who should I develop relationships with?

Strategic relationships are those that help you to pursue your organisation strategy. Be clear on what you want to achieve and decide who the people and organisations are who can help you. Decide at which level the relationship should take place. Is it an operational relationship – manager to manager, staff member to staff member; or is it at a governance level – board to board, chair to chair?

How can I develop relationships?

Find out who the key people are and make contact with them. There are many ways you can initiate a working relationship; the easiest is to ask people if you can meet to discuss how you might work together in the future.

For the relationship to develop both parties need to benefit from the time and resources that are put into the relationship. What can you bring to the table?

Relationships develop based on:

- Trust
- Mutual respect
- Shared values
- Honesty
- Open communication.

Work on the basis of win/win. Any partnership or collaboration needs to meet the goals of both organisations. Do not begin a working relationship with a hidden agenda, be open and up front about how you think you and your organisation can benefit from the ongoing partnership or collaboration.

Collaboration

Organisations that work in the same sector can leverage their resources and experiences to achieve a common goal. Collaboration on a project by project basis is an effective way to work together. There are many benefits, but there are also challenges.

Benefits:

- Wider pool of knowledge. People from each organisation will bring their skills and expertise
- More cost effective implementation eg. shared marketing
- Clients/customers will experience well-integrated service
- Not reinventing the wheel
- Larger network and reach
- Organisations maintain their own identity.

Pitfalls:

- Different goals from each organisation may not be understood or apparent until the project is underway
- Imbalance in what each party brings to the project (knowledge, funds, infrastructure) may cause issues as the project progresses
- Decision-making could become cumbersome if boards of each party need to be involved.

How to collaborate successfully:

- Define the scope of the project very clearly, make sure all parties are in agreement
- Identify what each party wants to gain, how will they each define success
- Agree on the budget
- Define processes for managing the project:
 1. Meetings
 2. Time commitment
 3. Approval processes
 4. Managing changes in personnel.
- Involve all parties in celebrating success
- Keep communication flowing between organisations and within each organisation.

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